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Creating an Elementary Charter School:

Power, Negotiations, and an Emerging Culture of Care

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Creating an Elementary Charter School:

Power, Negotiations, and an Emerging Culture of Care

by

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, Edward F. Sullivan, who taught me the value of hard work and commitment, my loving and caring mother, Anne Brooks Sullivan, who opened my heart and mind to the spiritual nature of life, and my brothers and sisters who came together to form my first introduction to culture: my family.

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Creating an Elementary Charter School:

Power Negotiations and an Emerging Culture of Caring

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The purpose of this study is to document and analyze patterns of organizational culture that emerge when a new charter school free of organizational history and bureaucratic restraints is given the autonomy to critically examine and define its own culture. This study presents an analysis of confluent forces that contributed to the development of a unique elementary charter school culture that has realized the benefits of balancing effectiveness and efficiency. The author documents a series of steps that were taken to bring this about, beginning with a description of the local educational environment, the critical players that defined and championed the cause, the political actors that supported the initiative, significant community debate, leading to a carefully crafted procedural process used to establish the first university sponsored charter school in the State.

It is an ethno-historical case study inasmuch as it traces component elements that were blended to create a dynamically balanced organizational culture. Using democratic dialogues,

constituent participants were given a voice to express their values, concerns, desires and expectations. Roles and responsibilities of teachers, parents, and school staff were defined according to verified "best practices" applied to assessed needs. The organizational "culture" that resulted became balanced in its common devotion to strive for both efficiency and effectiveness while tending to the broader affective needs of each child.

This study provides a review of literature regarding organizational culture, as well as charter schools. In addition, it draws from the expertise of participants and makes recommendations for universal school practices and school leadership. Cultural findings include a balance of efficient systems and caring practice, the presence of a continuous climate of community inquiry; a common partnership between parents, teachers, and the university; forums for democratic dialogue; and the promotion and support of equity by recognizing the unique needs of children and support of the "whole child". This study also identifies articulated shared basic assumptions and categories of culture that impact hiring and are passed on to new members, as well as the creation and use of stories, rituals, and ceremonies to reinforce core cultural values, recognize successes, maintain a rich sense of history and purpose, and demonstrate pride and joyous engagement. A key finding of the study is the presence of respect and caring and their influence in building a high sense of self-esteem for school participants.

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Introduction

Background

The purpose of this study is to document and analyze patterns of organizational culture that emerge when a new charter school that is free of organizational history and bureaucratic restraints is given the autonomy to critically examine and define its own culture. This ethno-historical case study records the start-up of a small open enrollment elementary charter school designed to serve grades pre-kindergarten through grade five. The school was founded on the promise of innovation through a research base that would provide models throughout the state and nation (Every Child, Every Advantage Document, May 2002). As the first university-sponsored elementary charter school in the state, it serves a diverse population of students using research-based instructional methods selected from the university with the hope of adding to the knowledge of best instructional applied practices .

This study capitalizes on the unique opportunity found in this start-up charter school to observe the creation of a school culture based on the espoused beliefs and shared assumptions of the school's membership in a broader context of the political climate and power brokerage that led to its birth. Three significant educational initiatives underlie the development of this charter school: researched-based reading, the K-16 national initiative, and the founders' ideologies and vision of charter schools. How this school's newly-formed democratic culture has interfaced with current state, and federal politics and policy is significant.

"Culture" in this study is used to describe socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions (formalized practices), and all other products of human work and

thought. Culture is a powerful abstract concept that permeates every form of organization. It evolves out of the interactions of people within an organization and is guided by leadership and the set of policies, norms, structural systems, and routines embedded in the organization (Robbins, 2001). Intent on providing shared meaning and structure to the group (Hanson, 2003); the Charter School Principal guided the formation of the school's culture and reports on this developmental process from her leadership perspective.

The development of "culture" is based on shared meanings within a group that become formalized over time, and this process can be observed in organizations as they grow and mature. Schein (2004) elaborates on the nature of organizational culture by stressing the importance of shared problem solving of external adaptation and internal integration in creating shared meaning within a group. This study uses Schein's definition of culture in its discussion of the school start-up and the analysis of what categories of culture emerge. It summarizes the pattern of shared basic assumptions embraced by the membership of the school as they solved the various problems encountered in the start-up, that they then pass on to new members as the correct way to think and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 2004).

Culture itself is abstract in nature, yet what is created from culture within an organization can be powerful in motivating and moving that organization towards fulfilling its mission. Charter schools provide a unique research opportunity to study culture in organizational design since they are created with the notion that autonomy, choice, and innovation will increase competition within the market of public schools and

will result in greater efficiency and increased student achievement outcomes. This, of course, begs the question about what kind of structures and behaviors need to be in place to effectively compete and produce desired outcomes.

The power of culture lies in its operation of unconscious, unexamined, assumptions that are taken for granted by a group (Schein, 1985). Hopefully, this becomes a positive driving force to create necessary tools for overcoming any problems that surface. How this translates into the production of effective solutions within educational organizations, or promotes effective practices and leadership in the creation of a school culture can provide us with a body of knowledge regarding how to develop new and improved instructional design and practice. The culture that developed within the charter school of this study balances the need for efficiency with effective fulfillment of personal human needs; which, it can be argued, was made possible by a decision-making process that was free of bureaucratic restraints.

In introducing this study it is important to discuss arguments that can be made to support the significance of its focus and research findings. They include:

- the need for the unbound organizational structure of charter schools,
- the economic argument of competitive advantage for charter schools,
- the political debate over democracy and liberty for charter schools, and
- the need to stress the affective side of schooling (nurturing of each student spirit) championed by the charter school in this case study.

Arguments to Support the Need for This Kind of Study

Claims for the Unbound Structural Framework of Charter Schools

Public schools are organized around a post-industrial model of efficiency bound by bureaucratic restraints. Over time the educational system in the United States has become tightly controlled due to external environmental pressures for control, the emergence of powerful new institutional actors, and an emerging institutional capacity, more tightly coupled with isomorphic processes, which encourage tighter institutional coupling (Fusarelli, 2002). These outcomes seem to reflect the tightly controlled nature of the model which continues to draw from the scientific management principles of factory production. The effectiveness of this model and the educational outcomes are questioned through various attempts at school reform.

In his book, *The Culture of the School and Problems of Change* (1996), Seymour Sarason argued that most education reforms fail because reformers do not take school culture into account. New school reform policies are devised as if they were going to be implemented in a vacuum, rather than in an institutional setting with centuries of cultural traditions (Fowler, 2000). Charter schools are market-driven and free to organize autonomously. They are designed uniquely to meet the needs of the market by serving a particular targeted population and are encouraged to be innovative in curriculum design and pedagogy based on the educational needs of the population served.

The outcomes of this new educational entity reflect its organizational design. Lubienski (2003) concluded that the dynamics of choice and competition built into the charter school design has contributed to changes in organizational structures and

administrative behaviors, but he also documented tendencies towards "isomorphism" as schools use their autonomy to replicate established practice found in successful schools. Campus-level institutional development is challenged by the demands from the national and state institutional environment which calls for adherence to an accountability system that may not match the new and innovative organizational goals of the school.

Distinct shared basic assumptions were formulated by the membership of this new charter school as it solved the problems encountered in the start-up and created a school culture, while it continued to hold membership within the larger institution of public school and the organization of the university. Isomorphic relationships are usually represented as sets of elements or characteristics that interact with other sets of elements and characteristics. How isomorphic dynamics across the local school district, the university, and the national school culture influenced and/or did not influence this local charter school's development is significant in understanding the impact of school reform efforts. Charter schools are designed to be an approach to public education that resists the isomorphic pressures to adopt the rituals and rules of the larger institutional environment in order to create efficient organizational models. Of particular interest is the influence that the autonomy of decision-making found in charter schools had on the creation of a new educational organization.

Claim of Advantage from Economic Competition for Charter Schools

Quantitative assessment of the impact of school choice on educational outcomes does not show clear evidence that various alternatives to traditional public schools deliver educational outcomes in a more efficient way (Goldhaber, 1999). The school choice

movement assumes that within a democratic free educational market, instructional innovation occurs and educational outcomes improve. High achievement of our students is important for our future labor force (Hanushek, 2002). Higher achievement is associated both with greater individual productivity and earnings, as well as with the faster growth of the nation's economy; therefore school reform efforts that provide the hope of increasing student achievement also have economic ramifications for our nation.

School choice legislation allows individual schools greater autonomy from state education regulations and local school districts. These educational organizations can respond to their markets by adapting to the differences in consumer needs and using target marketing as defined by parents, students, or community members (Hanson, 2003). Choice and competition encourage experimentation and diverse options to these consumer-targeted markets (Lubienski, 2003). "Reformers, consistent with assumptions of market theory, expect that changes in school administrative structures would lead to "different and innovative" classroom practices (Lubienski, 2003, p 399)."

Many opponents fear that increased school choice undermines support for traditional schools and may lead to the collapse of public schooling as we know it. There are limited definitive findings that charter schools have improved educational outcomes, and educational outcomes are the measure of productivity that we look to measure cost-effectiveness in funding schools, therefore the study of the organizational culture of charter schools is important in understanding how they effectively operate in order to support the economic reasoning behind school choice policy and planning.

The Political Argument of Democracy versus Liberty

Political ideologies continue to influence reform efforts in our nation. One consistent debate surrounds how we define democracy. Apple (2001) believes that it is in public schools that we secure and maintain a "democratic way of life" because it allows children the opportunities to experience equity towards a democratic future. Democratic schools are defined by Apple (1995) and other "progressive" educators as supporting a culture that believes in the welfare of others and the "common good." The Progressive Movement's view of a democratic culture is concerned with dignity and the rights of the collective citizenry. Racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and economic diversity are an important part of the context in which public schools operate and political decisions are made (Rosenblatt, 1996). This has led to the question of whether a single system of public schools can or should meet the demands of the diverse population found in public school. The charter school movement is a shift in political thought which supports schools of choice that specialize to meet the needs of a specific group.

For the last 10 years, the increasingly popular subtext of democracy in the United States is that it represents the freedom to consume and own within a capitalist society (Wells, Slayton & Scott, 2002). The implication within education has been freedom to choose schools and freedom from selected state regulations. The democratic dilemma has always been about the conflict between liberty and equality; however, within the current social and political context, the argument is clearly focused on liberty. An understanding of democracy within a capitalist society continues to focus on the idea of the market and the sanctity of individualism and liberty at all costs (Hanushek, 2002).

The issue of "democracy" versus the "market" centers on how democracy is defined. The liberty enjoyed under our democratic system is the central mechanism through which free market capitalism has flourished. Democracy within a capitalist society continues to focus on efficient systems that lead to market-driven productivity assumed to lead to the protection of individual liberties. Market based educational reforms such as vouchers and charter schools are criticized for being built on the premise that our society can be held together solely by the self-centered pursuit of our individual purposes as opposed to common, democratic purposes (Wells, Slayton, Scott, 2002).

As schools become more tightly coupled and directed by federal legislation which mandates a prescriptive "scientifically based" instructional practice, the tension between the progressive model of democratic schools and the conservative market-based concept increases. The focus of education politics has shifted from equality issues to issues relating to excellence, accountability, and choice (Boyd & Kerchner, 1988). Charter schools remain controversial in that progressive educators remain suspicious of their political positioning and true intent. A culture of fear persists in public school districts and stems from a lack of communication and understanding of the purpose for the charter concept (Staley, 2004).

Teachers who know their individual students as learners and who had believed that they were allowed freedom with pedagogy and practice continue to be constrained by an accountability system driven by a conservative agenda espousing the one right way. The emancipation promise of charter schools is an opportunity to create a balanced school culture which is free to emerge from the individual needs of a specific group.

Engaging in the democratic ideal of dialogue adds the value-rich perspectives of the membership to the information-rich perspectives of the expert researchers and policy-makers resulting in wiser policies. The use of dialogue as a means to create school policy is effective when it focuses on the collective problems of living together in communities and brings forth the wisdom inherent in the collective public experience (Yankelovich, 1999).

The charter school movement assumes that innovation occurs within a democratic free educational market which allows for school choice. Because of the unique organizational model of charter schools, it is important to study their organizational cultures to provide evidence for the organizational assumptions behind their creation and their role in our democratic society. This study analyzes the historical trends of the charter reform movement and how democratic principles led to the creation of one charter school's culture which balances political ideology.

Since the restraints of governmental funding and accountability continue to exist in charter schools, it is important to document a school culture that embraces efficiency and the production of measurable outcomes, and also demonstrates the democratic means by which the collective wisdom of its membership organizes to meet the needs of the targeted population. The motto for the school in this study is "Teaching to the Spirit of Every Child". How this school creates a culture that balances efforts to support the individual child's spirit and also assure rigorous instruction and measurable outcomes is of particular interest.

Need to Stress the "Affective Side of Schooling" to Ensure Total Effectiveness

The concept of culture is abstract in nature. School leaders who understand the power of symbols are much better equipped to understand and influence their school organizations. Meaning and connection are basic human needs which result in increased self-esteem (Maslow, 1970). Children feel secure and confident in their learning when they are connected to symbols, rituals, and ceremonies that reinforce an espoused belief in their ability as learners, and reflect the grand mission of the school. Symbols, routines, rituals, and ceremonies send powerful messages that consciously reinforce beliefs and expectations, and also support social-emotional growth and academic achievement. School leaders are instrumental in helping to shape an effective school when the leadership understands and encourages the use of symbolic forms and activities, and when the organizational culture is aligned to the challenges of the market (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

This school's cultural belief systems, demonstrated through symbols, stories, rituals, and ceremony exposes the expressive or affective side of the organization. This is an aspect of school that is often felt by visitors and members, but is not easily measured or defined. This study goes beyond the rational, traditional analysis of school structure in an attempt to see the life of a school in holistic systemic terms rather than in linear one-to-one measurements. The study focuses on the symbolic nature of school culture to better understand how the "spirit" of a school influences the full development of its children. Of particular interest is the role that the symbols, songs, and colors (found within the university culture) play in the creation of the school culture.

Being a charter school based on the promise of autonomy and authority in innovative decision-making, coupled with the commitment of a nationally recognized research-based university, this school is an ideal case study. The school is in a unique position as the first university-sponsored charter school in the state, and it is supported by a grand mission to explore issues and to create pioneering solutions regarding the elementary education of Hispanic and African-American children living in urban areas. It is significant that this school was conceived from a rational business ideology which envisioned the use of proven best practices in the education of a diverse population, while at the same time it was granted the power to create a unique democratic school culture of its own.

Theoretical Framework

Organizational culture was defined in a consistently throughout this study. Edgar Schein (2004) defines organizational culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that is learned by the group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration and that worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. This definition of organizational culture is the theoretical framework which guided the research and shaped the instruments to be used. For example, Schein's list of Various Categories Used to Describe Culture is the conceptual framework used to identify what shared basic assumptions were operating at the charter school and to describe categories of culture that emerged in its start-up.

The categories of culture listed by Schein (2004) which were used in describing what emerged in this study include:

Category	Description
Observable behavioral regularities when people interact	The language used, customs and traditions that evolve, and the rituals they employ in a wide variety of situations.
Group norms	The implicit standards and values that evolve in working groups.
Espoused values	The articulated, publicly announced principles and values that the group claims to be trying to achieve.
Formal philosophy	The broad policies and ideological principles that guide a group's actions towards stakeholders.
Rules of the game	The implicit, unwritten rules for getting along in the organization.
Climate	The feeling that is conveyed in a group by the physical layout and the way in which members of the organization interact with each other, customers, and outsiders.
Embedded skills	The special competencies displayed by group members in accomplishing certain tasks that are historically passed down without necessarily being articulated in writing.
Habits of thinking, mental models, linguistic paradigms	The shared cognitive frames that guide the perceptions, thought, and language used by the members and taught to new members.
Sharing meaning	The emergent understandings created by group members as they interact with each other.
Integrating symbols	The way groups evolve to characterize themselves that become embodied in material artifacts of the group.
Formal rituals and celebrations	The way groups celebrate important events, reflect important values or "passages" or milestones of members including initiation.

In summary, this ethno-historical case study documents the start-up of a unique model of school organization by examining the categories of culture that emerged.

The university elementary charter school in this study was conceived in a conservative political climate of school reform. Rational efforts were made: to enhance the use of scientific research in reading, to align the K-16 education pipeline, and to support school choice through charter schools. The story of the pre-conception of this school, and the powerful political actors who drove its vision, is reviewed as an interesting prelude to the analysis of the culture that emerged at the school. The shared basic assumptions learned by the membership of the school as they solved the various problems encountered in this charter school's start-up provides insight into the adaptive process of groups to define core values and create a distinct culture.

Research Questions

This study uses qualitative data collected from the school and its founders to present descriptive research examining the formative factors and school start-up and the specific categories of school culture that emerged. The following research questions served as a guide for this study:

- What are the shared basic assumptions operating at the charter school?
- What categories of culture significantly emerge and in what ways are they demonstrated in the school?

The answers to these questions provide a foundation for a broader discussion of how can the research findings impact future development of public charter schools and public school policy.

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that given the autonomous nature of a start-up charter school, the leadership at the school was given freedom to shape the school culture in a democratic manner free of institutional directives. A limitation to this assumption is in the nature of the school's sponsorship by one of the largest universities in the nation and its long legacy of institutionalized organizational culture, as well as the isomorphic pressures of the local, state, and national political environment.

In understanding culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions within a group which has developed from shared problem-solving and creation of effective solutions, we can see that there may be limitations in the unique nature of this school and its culture. As a qualitative study, the findings are subject to other interpretations. This study does not assume that the specific reproduction of best practices defined in one school can be applied to all schools. However, it does assume that the process for shared problem-solving created within an organization which influence the culture of school and its success can be generalized as best practice.

This is the study of an elementary level charter school which is comprised of a student population which is 80% economically disadvantaged, 75% Hispanic, and 25% African-American. This data also reflects the socio-economic and diverse urban setting of the community in which it serves and will thus lead to specific findings related to this community. This study is not meant to suggest that secondary education, traditional public education, or other ethnic communities are not as vital in bringing about education improvement, but insights into bridging the economic and cultural divide for groups like

those within this study can be generated. Policies must be developed that honor and appreciate the ethnic diversity in our school communities.

In her book, *Subtractive Schooling*, Valenzuela (1999) states: "…a community's interests are best served by those who possess an unwavering respect for the cultural integrity of a people and their history" (p. 265). This study assumes that by identifying a an efficient and caring school culture in an ethnically diverse community, successful practices to help bridge the cultural and economic divide will also be identified. A model of organizational culture is presented in this study that can be emulated in building new school cultures that balance efficiency and effectiveness while serving the needs of the "whole child."

Another important limitation to be considered is that the individual founder of an organization has certain personal visions, goals, beliefs, values, and assumptions about how things should be. These will initially be imposed on the group, and members may well be selected on the basis of their similarity of thought and values. This is a primary act of leadership, but it does not automatically produce culture (Schein, 2004). This study is limited by the fact that the founding leader of the school and employee of the university is also the researcher. Personal bias in reporting and analyzing is a factor to be considered in this study, recognizing the potential blur between "ideal" and "real" inferences and conclusions. However, observations and analysis in this study were corroborated whenever possible by charter school staff and outside observers to reduce bias and/or projections made by the researcher.

Due to the unique nature of this historical case study the researcher too a non-traditional approach to the organization of this study. The methodology used in this study, including standard triangulation procedures, is outlined in the appendix of this report.

Chapter 1

A Confluence of Forces

To understand the dynamics behind policies which result in the creation of a new organization, a good place to begin is with John Kingdon's research on agenda-setting. Kingdon (2003) explored how problems are recognized and defined, how policy proposals are developed, how political events crisscross, and how these things become joined at critical junctures. According to Kingdon, "windows open in policy systems." These policy windows, or the opportunities for action on given initiatives, present themselves and stay open for only short periods (Kingdon, 2003).

Kingdon identified three relatively independent "streams" through which various participants interact to ultimately form an agenda. The three streams are: 1) problem recognition, 2) policy formation and refining of policy proposals, and 3) political events or political implementation. For an item to be placed on an agenda, it must be recognized as a problem, and although a number of problems may be identified, only a very small percentage of them become agenda items (Kingdon, 2003). There are a wide variety of ideas floating around the educational community to solve problems. These become policy solutions or ideas that are generated by specialist in policy communities, such as networks of bureaucrats, politicians, academics and think tanks who share a common concern in a single policy area. Political, administrative and legislative powers give the legitimacy and authority to impact policy.

In this case study, the Dean of the College of Education described the establishment of the University Elementary Charter School as "a confluence of events".

The lead reading researcher in the College of Education described it as a coalition of forces. The story of the creation of the University Elementary Charter School is one of converging streams of problems, policy, and politics related to charter schools. K-16 education and researched-based reading initiatives, including the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, came together at the right place and time. As a result, a new organization, unlike any known in the state was born as the University Elementary Charter School. This chapter describes the underlying agendas and initiatives and how the embedded educational issues or problems led to policy changes driven by strong political and authoritative forces. This description of the political forces in play, coupled with the ideological motivations of the political actors, comprises a prelude to the start-up of the school and is an important piece in the history of its birth.

The Charter School Initiative

A General History

Charter schools are a unique study in organizational school culture and are a distinct departure from traditional public school culture. Public schooling in the United States has a history of bureaucratic growth to contend with the ever-growing population. "Americanization" of immigrants, for example, became the role of public schools with the mission of cultivating patriotism and good citizenship (Tyack, 1974). According to Tyack (1974), As schools were required to serve increasingly diverse student populations, this forced school leaders to use more bureaucratic methods to achieve efficiency in school systems. In turn, these school systems haphazardly utilized models found in business and factories that were believed to teach skills necessary for an industrial society.

Ray Budde's (1975) model for school districts mimicked the contracts given to explorers. He first used the word "charter" as early as 1975, but it wasn't until 1988 that the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President, Al Shanker, publicly introduced the word by describing the idea to the National Press Club (Vergari, 2002). The Budde and Shanker Charter Model viewed teachers as central players in the educational process and parents and community members as advisors. The organizational design of this teacher-driven model presented a solution which addressed the students who were not being reached by traditional urban schools. The intent was to break down the authoritative powers of district bureaucratic organizations and empower teachers within smaller individual organizations to create instructional programs for underachieving students.

A number of reform movements aligned to support Shanker and Budde's ideas and enhanced the charter school concept. They included:

- choice for students,
- competition to break public schools' monopoly,
- school-based management,
- deregulation to remove constraining rules and policies, and
- accountability for results (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002).

Minnesota is credited with being the great risk-taker on charter policy by becoming the first in the United States to pass a charter school law in 1991. City Academy Charter School in St. Paul, Minnesota became the first operational charter school in the United States in 1992. It was chartered to target thirty-five inner city high school dropouts with a focus on traditional academic subjects while emphasizing individual attention in a smaller setting. It became a model

of providing services to at-risk students in a large urban high school (Vergari, 2002). Charter school legislation soon evolved less into educational points of view and became more about compromising with policymakers and the variety of public interests. It shaped itself into educational policy that was flexible enough to serve multiple goals defined within various environments.

Since the early 1990's, over 41 states have authorized legislation creating charter schools. About two-thirds of these are new institutions, with the bulk of the remainder being public or private schools. Charter legislation has also been passed in the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. There are 400 charter schools operating in Arizona and California and roughly 200 spread across Florida, Michigan, and Texas. State by state variations in laws, from start-up to closing criteria, combined with their localized character make each charter school's culture one of a kind (Deal & Hentschke, 2004). Charter schools emerge distinctly from the passion and commitment of founders addressing varied educational needs. The distinct mission of these schools is to create individual organizational cultures which reflect the profound impact of the founders' personal values and beliefs.

Opponents

Opponents of charter schools are often cited as the groups who are most threatened by the shift in educational policy and funding. Teacher unions, school boards, and school and district administrators are seen as defenders of the status quo (Brouillette, 2002) and continue to have grave concerns over the loss of power and reduction in funding. Teacher unions were the most active in opposing and influencing charter school

legislation and implementation across the states (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002), but by 1997 these groups actively began to participate in state discussions on drafting charter school bills (Brouillette, 2002). Opponents argue that charter schools skim off the best students from traditional public schools and create an unequal opportunity to which parents are drawn as a better opportunity for their children. By virtue of the fact that they have chosen charter schools, these children have a sense of distinction and are perceived to be better off than those who have not.

Proponents

Supporters of charter schools reflect a blend of ideas that span across party lines and a movement characterized by diverse participants since its inception. Right wing conservatives, progressive educators, Christian fundamentalists, and civil rights groups are included in the pool of charter advocates (Vergari, 2002). By 1995, its supporters also included teacher organizations, business groups, and parent associations, expanding the list of supporters. Three groups of charter advocates include: 1) zealots, who favor market-oriented solutions to public schooling; 2) entrepreneurs, who hope to profit from the entry of private enterprise into the realm of public schooling; and 3) reformers, who wish to expand opportunities with public school (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). It is a politically diverse mix of associations that make up the majority of charter school advocates, with each group contributing to the school culture in different ways.

Charter school advocates encourage choice, autonomy, and competition to make schools more flexible and innovative, with the perception that such innovations will produce identifiable improvements in student achievement. Innovation and

diversification are primary goals of the charter movement with the intent of engaging children and families who were not successful in the uniformity of the traditional public school system. Proponents believe that charter schools provide an alternative to families who have limited choices related to their residential location, or expensive private schools. These arguments affirm the importance of variety and innovation based on market theory.

Charter school culture is shaped by common interests and values, and is given form through its community based on educational issues. Supporters believe that state funds should support the education of children rather than the operation of school districts; which supports the notion that public funds should follow the child. One-half of U.S. charter students belong to a minority group, compared to one-third in conventional schools, and thirty-four to forty-one percent of charter school children come from low income families (Deal & Hentschke, 2004).

Innovation Stemming from Research and Development

The policy goals for charter schools in most states continue to be focused on the innovative intent of these schools. "Innovation" was specified as a policy goal in approximately three quarters of state charter laws. Policymakers have often assumed a causal connection between structural reforms and innovations in classroom practice. "Reformers consistent with assumptions of market theory expect that changes in school administrative structures will lead to "different and innovative" classroom practices" (Lubienski, 2003, p 399). Teachers in charter schools expect more freedom to employ

innovative methods, and there are similar expectations from parents and charter school founders.

Reformers cast charter schools as "Research &Development (R&D)" centers or "laboratories" to pursue "break-the-mold" innovations in classroom practice, when at the same time media coverage and political attention focus on high stakes standardized tests. This creates pressure to stick with conservative and proven approaches. The University System in this study had a vision of an "R&D" center in the creation of a research-based demonstration charter school. This vision was driven by the Chairman of the Board of Regents whose powerful political agenda included enhancing the educational market through the establishment of charter schools.

Political Support for Charter Schools

Having served as an influential member of the Governor's Business Council (G.B.C.) and Chairman of the University Board of Regents, the Chairman was well known throughout the state for his political determination and staying power (Secretary of Education, personal communication, 2006), especially in his support of charter school legislation. He had a long history of advocacy for charter schools. One of his first school reform measures was to put into law a legislative proposal to open charter schools. He valued school choice and the power of charter schools to be alternative, innovate, experiment and study best practices and solutions to issues in public education. He viewed charter educators as entrepreneurs who could demonstrate ways to do things differently or even better. Charters were an opportunity to show larger school districts what worked and didn't work and gave students the choice beyond the confines of the

traditional public education system. He felt that special types of schools could develop that would better suit certain students and their parents as opposed to a rigid "one size fits all" model (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

Charter schools began to emerge nationally in the early 1990's. The Chairman's state was one of the first major states to initiate charters into law. Being a passionate businessman who valued quality and efficiency, as well as a strong advocate of charters, The Board Chair was known to personally make a plea before the State Board of Education to close charters that were not being accountable. Being a renowned economist, it would appear that competition within the market drove the Board Chair's support of charter schools, but competition was not a word that he felt applied to charters. He believed in a real market people have a choice.

> You don't go to a market and say this is the only place in town. I can only buy a sweet potato, right? And if you're the only place that's going to sell it you may have more choice then I do, but I'm not going to get a good product" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

He was passionate about choice; believing that parents and students had a right to choice in their education. "If the system doesn't provide choice, then it becomes a regulated serious monopoly and these are not effective" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). Charter schools were a chance for people to try something different that might be more productive for certain sets of children, and setting a standard others could rise to. If a charter school could be successful then why couldn't other schools be effective? "This is a common value of most Americans. They look for the best, at the numbers, at rankings. As consumers, we do this in everything we buy" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

The fear surrounding the Chair's argument for school choice was the gateway it opened to school vouchers. He and the Governor talked a lot about vouchers (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). They supported a trial voucher program, but since vouchers were not one of the Governor's major policy goals it did not receive a lot of emphasis. The Governor's public education initiatives included accountability, technology, reading, and school choice. The Governor's Business Council represented a coalition between the Governor's office staff, the Governor, and the business community. They collaborated on developing policy, so if the Governor wanted to do something, they got the business community to agree or vice versa, and they did it (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). Through the G.B.C., private money was contributed as corporate support for specific policies, and some foundation money was raised for specific things such as charter schools.

The Governor's Business Council was supportive of providing choice in education. Many argued that vouchers and charters took money away from public schools, yet this did not make sense to the Chair since charters are public schools. Vouchers on the other hand included funding private schooling and therefore never succeeded with the support that charter schools did. Charter school legislation became an initiative the Governor supported throughout his term, so when the Chair proposed charter legislation he and others in the Capitol City knew he had the backing of the Governor.

As a freshman member of the Board of Regents, he introduced long-time political allies and colleagues to the administrators at the University System who had the influence

and determination to make policy changes happen. He knew the Dean of the College of Education and had admiration for his commitment to school reform. The Chair continued to show interest in school reform when serving as the Board's Chairman of the Academic Affairs Committee, particularly K-16 and charter school initiatives. In 1997 he spoke before the legislature when he saw charter schools were not being given state support and funding had been reduced. "The State Board of Education was not paying much attention to granting charters and there was resistance by educators to help charters. Even though charters were separate and independent, they needed support like other public schools" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). The Chairman saw that charter schools were similar to start-up businesses and needed financial support. "I asked for some help and the answer I got was 'Good luck!'"(Chairman, personal communication, Jan.17, 2006).

When he didn't receive the support, the Chairman moved forward with all the political zest for which he was known. He received advice and a letter of support from the Governor, and based on his own creditability, he was able to gain funding from several major foundations in order to create a charter school resource center. Designed after a model he observed in Massachusetts, he championed charter support by finding its director and beginning the Resource Center. Its goal was not to provide financial support, but became a charter support system through advice on policy, best practices, forms, applications, and a weekly informational newsletter. People who started charters were good educators, but not necessarily administrators, fundraisers, and/or landlords (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

When the Chairman sensed that they were not receiving support from the State Education Agency or regional service centers, he took it upon himself to raise the money to provide services through the Charter School Center. The center hosted annual charter conferences and as Chairman of the Governor's Business Council's Education Committee, he was able to give political leverage to the first conference by having the Governor address the participants. His support helped set the stage for fundraising. "The Governor gave his proxy support so that I could go out and get the other support from business groups" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

As the Governor's Business Council was coming up for another session, and while charter schools began to grow, the financial dilemma became more apparent. The Governor suggested that a member of the business council be enlisted to head up a task force on charters. The head of a high profile energy company was recruited. He said, "If you call or write I would consider heading up the task force" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). The Governor sealed the deal by writing him a letter telling him, "I am glad that you have accepted the job" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

With the commitment of the head of the Energy Company, plus strong support from the Chairman, the charter school movement created its own financial center which raised several million dollars. This was another well-maneuvered support for charters from the business community. It raised over five million dollars in either gifts or loans in just over a year for use by charter schools for capital expenses. Schools could borrow fifteen to twenty-five hundred thousand dollars for school start-up costs. Housed within

the energy company's corporate offices it became a banker's lending system for charters. The Governor made the announcement after it was set up referring to it as the "charter school bank". Being such an appealing concept, several million dollars in loans were initially contributed. Corporations were able to loan money easier then donating funds by offering loans at four to five percent interest. "These were not high risk loans and very few defaulted" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

The energy company was a major corporate leader and donor to the charter school bank, and they drew others to contribute. With the support of the Governor, the Governor's Business Council and the leadership of the energy corporation, the funding of start-up charters was a great success for several years. With corporate and political changes, and with growing issues regarding the success of charter schools, the Charter Center and charter bank's work could not be sustained. The leadership at the corporation began to unwind when its C.E.O. left the company. Money was given back to most of the people who had lent funds. However, with a continued focus from the Chairman on supporting charters, the funds that remained were redirected to a new charter school policy institute. The Charter School Resource Center and the financial foundation formed through the Energy Corporation were two examples of ways the G.B.C. supported charters.

The Chairman was actively involved in public education and he had the political alliances at the state capitol. With the power of the state leadership behind him, he began to also raise the visibility of K-16 initiatives. He had grown disappointed in the State Board of Education and Education Agency's job of granting and supporting charters. As

early as 1999, he questioned why major universities didn't grant charters. He wanted to give universities the authority to grant charters in the same way as the State Board of Education. Having seen this model in a few other states, he believed if a university was committed, charter schools would receive long term support. He proposed giving universities authority for granting charters to the legislature in 2001. This resulted in new charter legislation referred to as Subchapter E allowing for a four year public college or university to sponsor a charter school without the same competitive process that an ordinary non-profit would. With this mechanism in place, the University System could move forward with the idea of creating a charter school. "If we had to go through the competitive process it would not have happened" (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004). The University in this case study was the first entity to take advantage of the new legislation and became the first Subchapter E university-sponsored charter school in the state.

Every Child, Every Advantage –The P-16 Initiative

Momentum for building a university-sponsored charter school began in 1999 when U.T. System began a three-year effort designed to stimulate and enhance K-16 initiatives at all of its component institutions. Based on these initial efforts and the challenge to ensure readiness for higher education, the University System launched a major, system-wide program entitled, *Every Child, Every Advantage*. It was the System's commitment to teachers and children and included three key initiatives. These initiatives included: 1) strengthening university-based teacher preparation programs, 2) creating

high-quality training and instructional tools for public school teachers, and 3) initiating an aggressive research agenda (Every Child, Every Advantage Document, May, 2000).

The Chairman of the Board was known as a major advocate and "driving force" (Secretary of Education, personal communication, Sept. 9, 2006). for school reform in the state. In the late 80's he chaired a think tank or policy center which was housed at the University. This center designed and launched the public school accountability system. It was funded for a study to look at the State's accountability system in 1991. And by 1993, the Chairman brought a proposal to the legislature that shaped the accountability system which exists in the state today. The Chairman was a political voice determined to tighten accountability measures, and though a volume of education groups and legislatures were opposed to the legislation, he persisted until it passed in 1993.

After the Republican Governor was elected in November 1994 the Chairman and his colleagues worked tirelessly to change the entire State Education Code. He was appointed by the Governor to the Governor's Business Council's, chaired its' Education Committee, and was assigned to the University's Board of Regents in 1999. With much confidence in the freshman regent, the Chairman of the Board at that time assigned him to be the Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee. One of his first efforts was to discuss the concept of K through 16 education when the term K-16 was not widely used. The Chairman wanted the system to be even more focused on K through 12, but build a continuum of services through college or grade 16. This novel idea was debated at the Regents level with many believing that universities should only be responsible for higher education.

The President of the University at that time was quoted as saying, “Well of course we should”. “If we don’t, who else would do it?” (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). With the support of the President of the University and the Regents’ Academic Affairs Committee, the K - 16 Initiative began. The University President assigned a Vice-President for K through 16 who began work with the public school systems. The initial goal was to work closely with teacher education programs aligning higher education programs to public education systems. With the passionate commitment of the Chairman and the President, K through 16 programming became a credible initiative. In his position of leadership, the Chairman knew that his focused interest and lobbying efforts would raise visibility for K through 16 programming. “When you show the importance then things happen” (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

K through 16 programming and resources were discussed in committee, but no specific program was created. The Chairman stressed the idea of helping state leaders in higher education understand that the University system was committed to this initiative. He was intent, while chairing the Academic Affairs Committee, on bringing experts in from various parts of public education. An attempt was made to showcase the various programs which addressed issues in public education being offered throughout the system. From Brownsville to San Antonio, programs such as the reading research and programming at the Center for Reading and Language Arts in the University’s College of Education was highlighted before the Academic Affairs Committee and the Board. As experts came before the Board of Regents, the university system began to understand that addressing issues of public education from a K through 16 perspective was a priority, as

least for the Chairman of Academic Affairs. The Chairman gives full credit to the Chancellor for formalizing the University System's K through 16 Initiative when he came on board in 2002. With all forces aligned, the initiative was elevated to 'high priority' at the University System.

The Chancellor was well respected as a scholar and for his legal expertise in public education. He had authored a book entitled, *Education Policy and Law* and taught a course of the same name. He was also well known for co-counseling for the plaintiffs in the original school finance lawsuit, Rodriguez vs. San Antonio. Having worked at a government childhood project, and at an educational law center while serving at an Ivy League University, he was a champion for equity in education. When the Chancellor arrived, he put as much "horsepower" into K-16 as he could. He described himself and the Chairman as "being cut of the same cloth," having a very strong view that higher education had a significant role to play from K through 16 .(Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006).

The Chancellor attributes the movement of the K-16 Initiative to the Chairman and his dominant role in improving K-12 education, since he had worked at both state and federal levels on education reform. The power of the Chairman's ties to the Governor's administration was evident in his participation in the formulation of the *No Child Left Behind Act.* His political influence, and "something of a salesmanship job" with K-16, was a dominant factor in the Chancellor's support of both the Chairman and the K-16 Initiative (Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006). Though the

Chairman took the leadership role, there was a natural alliance between the Chairman and the Chancellor to support K-16.

"It wasn't that anyone was opposed to the idea of K-16, but if you asked the average professor, department chair or provost it was clear the sentiment was simply that "we have enough on our plate, we've got higher education graduation rates, and our research priorities to worry about"(Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006). The Chancellor does not recall people at the University dragging, kicking and screaming, but it was not a natural part of the workings of a large higher educational institution like the University, or for the University System, to provide an innovative, unusual model program aimed at providing quality education to low-income children. The Chancellor made it clear that it was one of his highest priorities for the system-at-large and for local university campuses. He solicited the help of the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and knew that to move the initiative forward he would have to raise and allocate funds. He did his best to locate dollars knowing that in order to establish this as a priority; funds would have to be located within the system to defer the expense.

The Vice Chancellor recalls the strong encouragement of the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Regents as well as the years of supporting discussion around the notion of K-16. The system worked with various components of the university to develop a plan for a workable idea that could be implemented (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006). Work to develop a plan began in late 2001 and into early 2002, within the climate of the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation which had been signed by the U.S. President. A close ally and colleague of the Chairman became a

special assistant to the U.S. President and facilitated the drafting and passage of this bill. He was later hired by the University System to draft the K-16 policy, *Every Child, Every Advantage*.

NCLB represented a major shift in federal policy in K-12 education by requiring states to set high standards for student achievement, measure whether the achievement goals were being met, and provide annual report cards to parents about the overall quality of the school their child attends, and their child's progress in reading, math, and science. As a result of this legislation, significant resources would begin flowing to state's to address: 1) the needs of disadvantaged students, 2) reading instruction rooted in research-based methods that work to ensure that all students are reading on grade level or above by the third grade, and 3) the strengthening of teacher quality through improved training (Every Child, Every Advantage Document, May 2000).

The state in this study was already ahead in implementing many of the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act* and was considered as having one of the nation's leading public school accountability systems. It was apparent that the U.S. President was intent on using an accountability model he had previously created in his home state as part of his national educational agenda. Reading was also viewed as a top priority in the state since1997, when the state legislature funded a state reading initiative.

Educational reform efforts, such as N.C.L.B., require schools to demonstrate that they are achieving educational outcomes with students performing at a required level of achievement (Stanovich & Stanovich, 2003). This task was not easy and required teachers to use specific knowledge and skills. Standards-based reform required a high

degree of curriculum alignment. The classroom teacher needed to be clear about what was to be taught and how it was tested. Instructional practice needed to be proven effective in addressing the curriculum and in demonstrating an understanding of assessments. Teaching methods were expected to lead to student learning outcomes that were the focus of the assessment standards.

An important element to curriculum alignment includes understanding the individual learner, and in a typical classroom of over twenty students this is a difficult task. Keeping abreast of the progress of each individual student is essential to assure successful mastery of grade level standards. Teachers were expected to be strategic in assessing what students understand, diagnosing what they need to learn, and prescribing methods and materials for classroom instruction. A variety of university system centers had already researched methods to predictably address these issues.

The Reading Initiative

Teaching reading is a basic skill on which all future education depends. Children who do not learn to read early will not easily master other skills and knowledge. National longitudinal studies show that more than 17.5 percent of the nation's children (about ten million children) will encounter reading problems in the crucial first three years of their school experience. Approximately seventy-five percent of students identified with reading problems in the third grade are still reading disabled in the ninth grade (National Reading Panel Progress Report, 2000). Low reading achievement is well documented as the root cause of chronically low-performing schools, which is not only harmful to the future of students, but also results in a loss of public confidence in our school system.

New scientific research provided the knowledge to teach all but a handful of severely disabled children to read well (Moats, 1999).

Scientists estimated that fully ninety-five percent of all children can be taught to read, yet nearly twenty percent of elementary students nation-wide have significant problems learning to read. The rate of reading failure for African-American, Hispanic, limited-English speakers and economically disadvantaged children ranges from sixty percent to seventy percent (Moats, 1999). It is clear that most children will learn to read, but research findings demanded that struggling readers must be assisted in an organized, systematic and efficient way, by a knowledgeable teacher using a well designed instructional approach.

Historically reading research and practice have been a focus in the State. Leaders were proud of the reading research being published at three major research centers in the State. This research had led the way for every other state, which has resulted in various approaches to legislation on this issue (Director of Reading Center, personal communication, Oct. 15, 2004). It included the work of researchers at the University Medical Center, work at an institute for measurement and evaluation center, and the Center for Reading and Language Arts in the College of Education at the University. These three centers were not only aligned in their interest to research reading teaching methods, but they were also engaged in translating research into practice. This production of knowledge, considered to be the best research and teacher training efforts in the nation (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006), was tapped by the Governor's office which aligned the centers in a common mission to address the prevention of reading

difficulties in the State. The Chairman of the Board had a history with the reading initiative long before he served on the Board of Regents. As a member of the Governor's Business Council he can be credited with helping to develop the reading initiative in the State, and he conferred "expert status" on researchers promoting strategic intervention through explicit instruction.

The Governor announced his desire for "every child to read by the third grade and keep up at grade level for the rest of their time in school". He was really able to promote reading because it was important to him (Director of Reading Center, personal communication, Oct. 15, 2004) and his family. The Governor's mother was publicly committed to family literacy while serving as First Lady, and his wife was a passionate advocate for literacy since her days as a public elementary school librarian. Whatever the combination of influences on the Governor, it was a powerful political decision for him to tap into the science of reading and lead the way in these education reform efforts. "This was the first time that the business community or a major political party delved into the curriculum in schools" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

The Chairman recalls organizing one of the first educational summits which included members of the business council along with reading experts from around the country (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). They were a relentless force in organizing the system to assure that the Governor's vision of reading literacy was played out in both policy and programming. They considered him a pioneer in his move toward reading reforms and in extending himself into the area of curriculum that had been traditionally left up to local school districts.

With an articulated request for reading reform the loyal supporters of the Governor began a revolution in the State and later the country. They were not educators, but results-based business peoples who reorganized the national debate; a debate which later was attributed to the Governor's image as the "Education President". "I walked into it without understanding it, but am now pleased it's going in the right direction with a blend of research-based reading techniques being used to improve reading instruction" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

A reading expert from the University of Illinois was asked to speak on how children learn to read at the University of Houston in 1995. The group of twelve to fifteen participants included the State Commissioner of Education, who had been appointed by the Governor, several people from the University of Houston, and several school principals. After a twenty-eight minute presentation as a reading expert, she was elevated to become a state-level reading consultant (Reading Consultant, personal communication, Oct. 15, 2004). She was then invited to present at the Governor's first major education summit which was organized by reading educators and business people from the Governor's Business Council. Several people including the Commissioner and the Governor spoke on the reading initiative.

This would be the beginning of a series of summits organized throughout the state in which reading researchers would participate. Local citizens attended and certain participants were selected to speak on illiteracy, and it was often a parent or a person of color who had risen above the restraints of poverty. These summits were effective in bringing attention to the crisis of illiteracy and the Governor's plea for improved reading

instruction in our public schools (Reading Consultant, personal communication, Oct. 15, 2004). The Commissioner of Education requested that the reading expert move to the State to assist in addressing the problem. For the first time there was a confluence of varied parties, including the governor's office, the Governor's Business Council, and the State Education Agency, all focused on identifying and prescribing the stated crisis in education; e.g. reading training and instruction. The alignment of the problem stream and the politics stream were powerful in the discussion of creating state policy in reading. Educators at every level were resistant to the idea of a prescribed approach to reading instruction and were offended by the arrogance of the state agencies overstepping into the arena of reading pedagogy and curriculum.

The National Reading Panel had published a report five years prior to this on research which supported reading instruction. In this report, professors at various State universities supported the tenets of whole language and the evidence that children learn to read naturally, as they learn to walk and talk if the environment is created to support it. For proponents of more explicit instruction, this seemed like a risky approach to teaching economically disadvantaged students who did not have the advantages of environmental design. Instead of finding a sensible middle ground, the reading debate took up an enormous amount of time and energy on both sides. Conservatives worked to reform state standards for reading which would incorporate phonics instruction. It was an enormous enterprise involving public hearings where reading zealots on either side of the debate who would scream and yell to make their point heard.

With strong support from the Governor's Business Council, and the governor's office, the State Education Agency approved a new set of State Elements of Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in Language Arts which included phonics and reading comprehension to begin the State's reading initiative. As a result, all the state's kindergarten through third-grade teachers were trained to instruct students in reading using methods that were based on scientific research led by the Director of the Center for Reading and Language Arts in the College of Education at the University. During the first year, a kindergarten reading academy was developed, and in subsequent years first, second, and third grade training materials were prepared and presented.

At the same time the reading research center at the University Health Science Center, was creating a primary reading inventory to be administered in the middle of kindergarten, and at first, and second grade levels. Its intent was to standardize assessment of student reading levels when they entered and exited each grade level. During this same period, state support and funding was plentiful. The legislature voted on the primary reading inventory as a uniform measure to be used in all state-funded public schools, and on the continuation of required teacher training through reading academies.

As this was all happening, there was a coalition of forces engaged in related support activities for the reading initiative. The Governor's Business Council continued to bring in reading experts to give talks and advice. In an effort to impact undergraduate teacher training in reading, the University developed a higher education initiative which trained professors from various universities and colleges in the state in the same methodology found in the standardized state reading academies. To pull this all together,

the reading expert was asked to write a booklet on reading research and implications for reading instruction.

Research Based Beginning Reading Instruction was written in simple language and distributed throughout the state. It was followed by five other booklets on topics such as comprehension, vocabulary, and parent programs. The Governor became the U.S. President and went on to a new agenda in Washington, D.C. So, by the time the fourth grade academy was prepared, the funding and support for reading from the new governor had ended. However, through the course of the reading initiative the state had produced noteworthy publications and materials on reading instruction, and ultimately recommendations were made for the federal government to reframe these materials for national distribution. With this development, the reading initiative, which had begun regionally, gained national recognition.

Chapter 2

An Idea is Born

State Politics & Policy

What began as a collaborative effort concentrating on issues in reading would soon expand into a broader focus on foundational skills across the board. The State Commissioner of Education continued to bring in leading reading researchers and organized a powerful state-wide debate on reading. At the yearly Commissioner's reading conference, leaders from school districts blended with university faculty from various state institutions to debate "whole language instruction" versus phonics. The Assistant Commissioner for Statewide Initiatives was also focused on reading initiatives at the State Education Agency. She particularly was looking at how schools used early assessment data. Her commitment to data-driven performance measures was based in part on her previous experience working for an agency that researched student achievement data. She had been involved in a "best practices study" that analyzed the differences found at high-performing schools and schools that were average to low performing.

The Assistant Commissioner began to look closely at the results of the statewide third grade accountability exams and became concerned that schools were not using early assessment data effectively. These were considered to be a rich resource in terms of what students were doing at the early childhood levels and how important foundational skills were for building long-term success for these children. "The early childhood measures were deemed to be the insurance policy for success in third-grade" (Assistant Commissioner, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2004). The agency looked closely at

what foundational skills children needed to know and understand in order to be successful at the third grade and beyond.

There was evidence, however, that school administrators were not trained in the use of the early data as a predictor of later academic success. It was important for the State to get the initial instructional piece right since the legislature had continued to provide an inordinate amount of funding, including over $650 million alone directed to the mandated teacher reading academies. The State also provided funding for the development and distribution of the primary reading inventory and a Spanish counterpart at no charge to school districts.

With huge amounts of funding going to the public schools there was an expectation that districts would incorporate the research coming out of state reading research centers. The agency could monitor how many teachers were attending academy training and could get glimpses of the research being implemented effectively. But, agency leaders remained concerned that they could not find any place that had pulled it all together cohesively and coherently in a way that was the best case scenario regarding how good instruction looks in grade pre-kindergarten through five (Assistant Commissioner, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2004).

With the volume of funding being put into teacher training and assessments, the Education Agency's Office of State-wide Initiatives searched for model implementation sites. Out of approximately twenty schools that they visited, there were maybe two or three that they judged to have approximated the goal of pulling all the reading research together into systematic programmatic implementation. It was at this point that the State

Education Agency began to discuss the idea of creating a "test site" where the best research resources on training and practices in reading could be pooled to move forward. This site was envisioned to use all the screening diagnostics and progress- monitoring assessments effectively for teachers to make instructional plans based on the wealth of information about the essential components of teaching reading to individual students (Assistant Commissioner, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2004).

With the effective implementation of the essential components (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and fluency), they predicted that students would later demonstrate growth and progress on the state standardized assessments in third grade. Education professionals at the State believed it was necessary to establish a reliable model for creating and continuously improving the use of assessments and instructional methods to promote and determine success for all students. Having a demonstration site coupled with student achievement scores would ensure that the research model would be validated.

The Assistant Commissioner's office had a vision of a site in which teacher performance and practice at each grade level were true to the scientifically–based reading research (S.B.R.R.) model. Teachers would be trained to follow the instructional program and implement instructional techniques with fidelity. The administrative team would pay close attention to the data and use it to drive professional development, budgetary expenditures, and day-to-day instructional practice. She stated, "If you have a problem, you need to ensure you have done the appropriate training, that you have the right instructional materials, and you keep going back to that data to inform all those pieces;

then it becomes a very successful kind of operation"(Assistant Commissioner, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2004). The research confirmed to her that all five components of reading come into play in differing ways at each grade level. By using the training resources according to needs identified by data from assessments, you can diagnose where students are and prescribe instruction to move them to where they need to be.

The Grand Experiment: The University Charter School

The Assistant Commissioner verbalized the need for a site that would effectively bring together and showcase the consolidation of ideas that the State had developed and invested in the area of reading. She discussed this concept with a well-respected consultant who was working for the Governor's Business Council in the Fall of 2001. The consultant had been active with the business council and was hired to consult on the Governor's Reading Initiative. In conversation, the Assistant Commissioner complained "I have all these people calling me to visit a school that has implemented the five components of reading-based reading and I have no place to send them" (Assistant Commissioner, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2004).

As the national reading agenda grew momentum, her dilemma had grown to include requests for information and site visits from other states. The two brainstormed how to get all these components put together in a research-based demonstration site that would know how to do it "right" (Assistant Commissioner, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2004). They agreed on the need for a site that would demonstrate research-based practice driven by grade-level appropriate data. But, the State also wanted a site that would mirror a public school setting in drawing from a defined attendance area that had a

least fifty percent or more at- risk students. Designing a traditional lab school which selected students of university personnel would not provide the model needed. The intent was to design a school with the challenges of the struggling schools in the state in order to show practice leading to success rates that could be replicated. Taking all kids with the diversity of inner city communities through a lottery system would give the school a "believability factor" as a demonstration site (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004). The consultant's response was simply, "Well, why don't we start one?"

Support for the idea was evident at all levels, but especially from top-level players. The consultant had a powerful ally in the Chairman of the Board of Regents since he had hired her when he served on the Governor's Business Council. Being on the Board of Regents he was active in voicing his vested interest in K-12 education. The Chairman was known for his great interest in charter schools and was instrumental in the recent passage of charter legislation.

The mechanism for funding a demonstration school seemed apparent to the consultant. In 2001, the State Legislature amended the charter school law to allow public senior colleges and universities to apply to operate an open-enrollment charter school. The two proceeded to align forces with their friend and colleague; the leading reading researcher and director of the Center for Reading and Language Arts at the University. The Assistant Commissioner and the consultant wanted to assure that they had the technical assistance from the Center for accuracy in implementation of the five components of S.B.R.R.

During this preliminary discussion, the Center Director helped them refine the idea of a demonstration school. Being committed to any program that would improve reading achievement in the state, the Director was delighted to learn that there could be a place where people could come and see the program in practice. She believed if reading flourished then the entire primary educational program would also flourish. "Reading is the center for education and through a reciprocal relationship with content areas will fuel all other academic areas" (Director of Reading Center, personal communication, Oct. 15, 2004). In areas such as social studies students would increase content learning and this would only make reading stronger.

This meeting was later described by the Center Director as "…a factor leading to the University Charter School and how the train sort of got on the track and kept moving" (Director of Reading Center, personal communication, Oct. 15, 2004). "I just met with [the consultant] and we talked about it, and then it started growing and it really came to fruition" (Director of Reading Center, personal communication, Oct. 15, 2004). They were all in consensus about starting a charter school, so the next logical step was to meet with the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University System.

The Vice Chancellor clearly recalls that the first time the idea of an elementary charter school was presented to him. It was in a meeting with these ladies (the Consultant, the Assistant Commissioner, and the Center Director) in his System office. They discussed reading issues, how children learn to read, and about inquiries that were coming into the agency from around the state regarding the reading initiative. He became

aware that people wanted to see a model school that was implementing reading in an exemplary way (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006).

All three of these educational experts spoke in concert, and they agreed that although many schools were implementing parts of the research developed at the state reading centers, there was a need for a model school which implemented all components correctly. They pleaded their case that with the fiscal crisis in education this school could demonstrate how to implement programming efficiently through the charter model. The Vice Chancellor felt that the demonstration school was an interesting idea that appeared to fit with the goals of a K-16 initiative that he had been working to create (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006).

The Vice Chancellor's involvement in the charter school came in two different phases. In October of 2002 he was appointed Vice Chancellor for Educational System Alignment at the University. In this role, the K-16 Initiative (including the charter school) was directly in his portfolio. In November of 2002, he was asked to be chair of the charter school's management board. He continued as chair after the school opened in August 2003, and also after returning to a teaching position on the University campus in January 2004.

He was consistent in conveying a message regarding the value of the school to various groups who opposed the charter school. His main concern was to get the school established and to try to bring the various disparate individuals and groups to an understanding that this was an appropriate and worthy effort on the part of the University (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006). "The more I got involved,

the more strongly I believed that we should be involved. After working with the [Eastside] for twenty-five years, my personal vision was focused on the very positive things that I felt were going to come out of the school; to serve the children of lower income families on the [Eastside]" (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006). Even during profoundly dark moments of opposition the Vice Chancellor had faith that it was the right course of action.

The Assistant Commissioner (2005) recalls the consultant saying, "Well, I'm going to go down the hall and talk to the Chairman about this and see what he has to say". Though many within the University System would say that the Chairman declared that the University would start a charter, he recalls the idea bubbling up from conversations with both the consultant and the Vice Chancellor (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). The Chairman never agreed with the term lab school and refused to allow it to be used (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). He was pleased with the initial concept of a university charter because it would get the university personnel involved in the school and assure that it had a research base. It would also assure that another proposed school reform policy, the *No Child Left Behind Act,* would be integrated into the model.

The Chairman became a true champion of the idea and played a crucial role in guiding its development. He was a key figure in its architecture and supporter of the thesis to use techniques that were proven "best practice" based on scientific research or evidence. The reading initiative which began in the State Capital was an example of this

type of practice. It was evident that a research-based demonstration charter school supported by the University could only enhance educational reform efforts.

Another major player in the charter development arena emerged at the university. The special assistant to the U.S. President was an attorney who graduated from the University. He had recently returned to his law firm located in the same city and had a long standing professional relationship with the Chairman. They had worked together on state-level educational reforms in the State while serving on the Governor's Business Council. In early 2002 the special assistant became a paid consultant to the University System to address the K-16 issue. His primary responsibility was to create a K- 16 plan to include an elementary charter school and to continue the dialogue necessary with the Board of Regents to move it forward. This plan entitled, *Every Child, Every Advantage* was presented to the Board of Regents for approval by the Academic Affairs Committee in May of 2002.

As part of the university's research agenda, one of the K-16 initiative goals was to support the establishment of an elementary charter school. The school would served a diverse population of students and be operated by the University campus using instructional methods that were research-based and engaging in innovative teaching methods that would add to the research knowledge of best instructional practices (Every Child, Every Advantage Document, May 2002). The University System envisioned that by establishing a charter school with top-notch teaching and an empirically verified curriculum, it would over time help hundreds of children, as well as set an example of established best practices, and inform research (Chancellor, personal communication,

March 8, 2006). The school's intent was the promise of innovation through a research base that could generate replication models to be used throughout the state and nation.

The University had a long-standing relationship and numerous partnerships with the local community school district. It was a political challenge for the University to overcome the local school district's resistance to having a separate charter school not under its control. But, with little faith in the stability of the I.S.D.'s Board of Trustees and the lack of support from the superintendent, it was determined that it would be better to do a university-sponsored charter under the new legislation Subchapter E than a district charter (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004). With this mechanism the university would not have to go through the same competitive process that ordinary non-profits did.

Upon this decision the University became the first entity to take advantage of Subchapter E with the intent of being the first university charter school in the state. This subchapter was clear on the requirement that a four-year institution, public college/university be the sponsoring agent. Technically, the System could not be the sponsoring agent, so the natural place for the charter school to be placed was the local university campus. To further their capacity to move research finding to classroom practice, the University System moved forward in submitting this proposal to the State Education Agency and the State Board of Education for approval of a charter school.

The vision of the charter school was three-fold:

- To serve a diverse population of elementary students in the defined service delivery area;

- To establish a reading program for young children that is grounded in the scientific research conducted by the state reading centers and to serve as a model for the rest of the country; and,
- To adopt a math instructional program based on a study of the National Center for Educational Accountability based on the methodology of Just for the Kids to identify characteristics of math programs in high performing schools serving disadvantaged students until scientifically based research on math instruction becomes available (Every Child, Every Advantage Document, May, 2002).

The charter school was a new entity for a very complex organization which had no experience with operating a public school. It took a great deal of time and effort in order to find its place in this large bureaucracy. There were ideological and political issues which needed to be addressed. After years of previous experience at the University campus, the Vice Chancellor was well-respected as a judicious, diplomatic administrator. Knowing the challenges inherent in the creation of this novel school, he devoted time to get a number of people both inside and outside the university to give the charter school a chance to succeed. He did not underestimate the challenges that would be involved in dealing with both the State Education Agency and the University with their rigid regulations, bureaucratic structure, and complex policies. Charter schools were designed to "free-up" schools from some of the bureaucratic procedures and policies, but from the first meeting the nature of the University and the Agency became apparent and that this charter school would be unique (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006).

From the start, the Chancellor was committed to assuring the success of the children at the school by calling for every aspect of the school's programming to be determined by proven best practices on how low income children learn. He was committed to the use of ongoing assessments to measure progress and assigned another Vice Chancellor who was well known as a quantitative researcher to monitor progress. The University System knew that in order to sell best practices they would need to have hard data to back them up (Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006). State standardized assessment scores were expected to be strong, but the Chancellor knew that this was only one measure. He had the assistance of consultants to make the school a quality operation with highly qualified teachers, using the latest research findings, and employing strong accountability systems. He specifically asked for assurances from his staff that the school would not be a second-class operation.

Though the reading initiative reflected the work of research centers within the University System, the charter school became its primary initiative. Finances proved to be a major constraint along the way. Only a modest amount of financial support from foundations was expected to be available to support empirically verifiable research on how low income children learn to read. There was a natural alliance with the Chairman to get the school established, but they knew they were going to have to invest some money in it and raise more. The Chancellor did his best to lead by example by locating the dollars within the System and by establishing the school as a priority. He attempted to calm the University campus' concerns and met with the University President and Provost. With interest in this project stretching all the way to the White House, the start-up of the

school was assigned by the Chancellor to the newly appointed Vice Chancellor for Educational System Alignment and the consultant was officially hired to drive the project. She recalls this work as “the hardest thing she has ever done”.

Decisions such as this usually have a strong political component of vested interests. The decision to create programs in a bureaucracy is usually made at the very top of the organization. In this case, the Board of Regents played an important role. Since it didn’t bubble up in the university from the faculty, departments, or colleges or schools, it was destined to meet with resistance, and this was apparent from the moment this initiative was announced (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006). This particular project was not initiated carefully enough, nor was it contemplated or discussed with the groups that had the most interest in it. There were various levels of concern about the board action to initiate the school. Ideological issues emerged about whether a public university should be creating a school that could be seen as being in competition with the local public schools. Since the Board of Regents was appointed by a Republican administration, political differences also became apparent from the start. Many saw this as an action that was politically motivated and as an effort to move a conservative agenda.

From its inception, issues arose over who was really in charge of the charter school. The school was required to be sponsored by a university campus so it reported to the University campus’ Executive Vice President and Provost. Yet, the University System had created the school as part of the K-16 Initiative, and it believed it had a stake in its success. The University campus viewed the creation of the school as a partnership

in which the University System should have considerable responsibility and resources available. This became an ongoing discussion over ownership and responsibility, especially in regards to facilities funding. System stayed involved, but the working assumption from the campus was that it would be best if expenses would be divided fifty-fifty (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004).

This had to be negotiated with each issue that arose. The Vice Chancellor recalls starting without a charter in May 2002 without any idea of what we were doing, and within sixteen months of opening the school. "In thirty years of being an administrator at the university, I have never worked on a project that was any more difficult. It was a task with much work to be done and we still struggle to have adequate resources and facilities" (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006).

The consultant knew that in order to move this project forward she would need the assistance of the Dean of the College of Education at the University. She knew him to be familiar with the politics of Washington D.C., having served the Reagan administration during the drafting of *A Nation at Risk*. The Dean had close professional ties with the Chairman and was well respected by the Chancellor. He was well known for his efforts to support educational reforms that began in the state and were now outlined in the *No Child Left Behind* bill (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004). The Dean was well informed on the business of the Board of Regents and aware of their long-standing interest in education. Since the College of Education had a long-standing relationship with the System, he saw *Every Child, Every Advantage* as the University's response to the national agenda and N.C.L.B., and the establishment of the charter school

as a response to the State from a public policy standpoint. Its intention was to be responsive to the Governor, the Legislature, the Board of Regents, and other institutions (Dean of Education, personal communication, March 1, 2006).

Being interested in innovative approaches, he felt that the College should take leadership when charters became available. He saw a great need for a demonstration site outside the historical image of a college lab school; a site that reflected the real issues and new ideas of his college and would serve a dual mission of serving the Eastside community. With a personal history of immigration and poverty, he became an advocate for the university to show a passionate commitment to the Eastside (Dean of Education, personal communication, March 1, 2006). He was determined to demonstrate how to improve student performance to the broader community and wanted others to understand that what the university could make a difference in transforming lives. A demonstration school could support reading techniques learned in the college by pre-service teachers, but also other content areas like math, science, and social studies. The concept would allow for local control and improved teacher education.

> It was one place where we can turn to learn from and to understand learning programs, adding great value to the passion of the University and education….generating education as a source of knowledge to improve knowledge of the way we conduct our work (Dean of Education, personal communication, March 1, 2006).

Supporting the interest from System to show leadership regarding charter schools, the Dean worked with the consultant to navigate the waters of the University.

The Response of the University Campus

Moving forward, the Dean arranged a meeting to discuss the charter school with the President of the University in the Spring of 2002, shortly after the Board of Regents approved *Every Child, Every Advantage.* The consultant remembers the President being "not pleased with the idea of doing this charter" (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004). It had been mandated by the board and then sprung on him. The President was well aware of the Chairman's personal drive behind this project and the board's support of him. He knew that the capitol city was the logical place to house this new institution. When he got the order from System to create the school he was committed to do the very best job possible, but was caught in the polarized political debate on charter schools on the University campus. Many campus leaders, who later were recruited to serve on the school's management board, were surprised to find the university getting into the charter school effort.

Though the attitudes of some of the top leadership were resistant, there was a belief from others that it was appropriate for the University to do this. It was not incompatible with what the University had been doing in sharing research and best practices (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006). Schools like this had a history around and within universities for quite some time. The University would not be the first ever to have a research-based demonstration school. The incompatibility that troubled people at the University campus was that the opening of the school coincided with a recent period of maximum financial stress on the University (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006). The President was laying people off and asking

departments to cut their unit sizes. In this climate of financial reductions, and when the University was cutting back on other aspects of its mission, questions were raised about whether it was appropriate to open this school. The Chairman's strong interest, personal determination, and authoritative power made that, at most, a moot question.

The University's Budget Council repeatedly received questions about the university charter school from the initial discussions through the start-up. The issues surrounding the school became mostly financial for the President, and he continued to ask, "Are we going to do this? "How are we going to pay for it"? Since charter legislation did not provide for facility funding, there were big, long-term questions regarding the physical facility of the school. The central leadership conveyed a fair amount of grousing about having to create this school, especially within the financial environment of the University, yet it was consistent with their mission to do the very best job with it that they could (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

Creating a supportive attitude for the financial backing of the school was a significant contribution from the President and was supported by the Provost and Vice Provost who worked through issues of finances and university connections. The Vice Chancellor was known for his diplomatic approach and was well respected by the Provost and Vice Provost. He was also instrumental in calming the waters and in getting agreement from the University campus to move forward.

The charter school was not inconsistent with what the University was doing. The President had already picked out the University campus's connection to K-12 education as one of the six tenants of his presidency. He was especially interested in establishing a

demonstration school and was never interested in merely setting up a lab school where things would be tried out on kids, or where curricular innovation would be tracked and tested in a controlled environment. The idea behind the Chairman's vision to allow the school to be a venue where best practices could be consistently applied in a struggling environment made sense. Though he was consistently concerned with the "top-down-ness" in the creation of the school and the financial barriers the University was experiencing, he always considered it a worthy approach for the University to try to develop a school to explore things in their own way (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

In his first meeting with teachers at the school in July 2003, the President used the analogy of navel frigates which go out on their own before the large ships. Frigates are the eyes and ears of the fleet, but are away from the fleet so they have the freedom to act as they judge best and to practice their own lives as they judge best so as to be experimental (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006). The intent was to experiment, but also to bring into the school sound instructional practices that the University had tested in other environments and had reasonable confidence based on actual results.

The research agenda that had been envisioned from the beginning was not as much about creating research as it was about using proven methods based on research. To the extent that some research is created at the elementary school would simply be "gravy" (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006). The main production of the school would be first and foremost the success of the population that it served, but it was

expected that this success could be transferable to other schools. “People should be looking at what can work in schools with this type of population and have confidence that success can be met with children with this level of preparation from families of this kind of income and assure it can happen” (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

Community outreach and minority recruitment at the university remained a significant issue as it did throughout the state. This school suddenly represented an extended effort on the University’s part to improve relationships with the Hispanic and African-American sectors of the city’s metropolitan area. It became an important vehicle for improving the University’s relationship with people in this part of the city because relationships in the past were either non-existent or hostile (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

For the President and others around the university campus, getting this project off the ground took a tremendous effort. With the help of System’s permanent university funding, they decided to construct facilities and reached an agreement in which the System would pay the non-recurring cost. “It was a step-by-step process in which we worked out answers as we went. It was not something that we planned at all in detail. In fact we are still getting answers step-by-step on this one, with the main support coming from the work of individuals who put a lot into the school” (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

The supervision of the Elementary Charter School was delegated to the Provost and Executive Vice President of the University. He was first given a report in the Spring

of 2002 which laid out a number of initiatives. It included a reading initiative involving the Health Science Center and the Reading and Language Arts Center in the College of Education. What disturbed both the Provost and the Vice Provost was a reference in the report to the need for an elementary charter school in the Eastside because the local school district was not doing a good enough job. With a history of collaborative relations with the school district, the Vice Provost reported, "I'm not sure that that's something you ought to say in a report" (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006).

There was obviously a need for greater clarity on who would be responsible for what. It was not exactly clear in the report regarding who would be responsible for the school or would fund this project. Part of the application included a letter from the Chancellor stating that there would be a loan from the System to the University campus, but there was much consternation within the campus's central administration that this was an un-funded mandate and that they would be expected to pick up the cost of the construction of the facilities by paying back the loan to System. The relationship between the System and the University struggled because there were feelings that the System wanted to do this and the University was going to be forced to do it even though there was no funding allocated. There were lots of questions about how it was going to be done and who was going to pay for it (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006).

The question of costs did not overcome the desirability of the idea. The Provost was aligned with the President in his concerns that the development of this school would add costs in the middle of a $30 million budget reduction in which programs were being cut (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004). In his mind, there may have been a

difference of opinion regarding the timing, and serious worries about the $3 million plus in capital costs for this endeavor, but no resistance in terms of the attractiveness of the notion of a school on the Eastside. It was an intriguing idea, but with uncertainties about operating and capital costs it was an expensive initiative (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004). There where in-depth conversations about whether or not to go forward with the idea. The Provost was a seasoned university administrator with a fun-filled approach to his work, but was also savvy in the political dealings of the University. He was well aware that the Chairman of the Board of Regents was the person pushing hard on this project and of his connections to N.C.L.B. and charter schools.

The idea had been born and the infant was not going to be left out in the cold. It was clear to the Provost and his advisors that this would not be your average charter school. After much debate at the University campus, the decision to get behind the charter school was persuaded by the success of the reading program that was to be utilized in the charter school that had been developed in the College of Education and was being used as a national model. The university personnel involved could see that this offered an opportunity to bring a volume of other resources and research to the table, including nursing, social work, education, speech and communication, and fine arts. The Vice Provost viewed his role as a facilitator in integrating these resources into the school.

Being at the University for over thirty years, the Vice Provost had relationships with most departments, and therefore was the key person to set up the meetings and to make the introductions. With a positive attitude and a passionate commitment to the school, the Provost's office won the support of various deans, associate deans and

department chairs in targeted colleges and departments at the University. The Provost's intent, like others, was for the school to educate children with the latest research at the university, not study them like in a lab school (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004). To assure that the school was a good demonstration of best practices in public education that could be replicated by other schools, the university did not contribute to operating expenses beyond facility maintenance, but it did provide a clear model for university involvement through the provision of curriculum resources and training expertise.

Chapter 3

The Struggles of the Charter Process

There were a number of complex issues to navigate in the year before the school opened. The University needed to get approval from the State Board of Education, a management board needed to be organized, a principal and staff needed to be hired, a curriculum needed to be defined, and a site and facilities would have to be determined. The Chairman remained supportive in the background, but it was the strength of the consultant and the Vice Chancellor that drove this project to completion. "Once you have the support of a person like the Chairman and the Vice Chancellor, the project moves along at its own pace" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

The consultant was the perfect choice to lead this endeavor since she was the only person available who had experience starting up a school, serving as a school principal, and working through the political waters of education policy in the state. With her expert knowledge she was hired to write the charter application, create a business plan, and work out the volume of details with the Vice Chancellor and the central administration at the University campus. "I knew that when you open a new school you need a leader, a governance structure, facilities, money, teaching staff and students" (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004).

"It was hard to start a school since nobody knew how to do it. Educators go to schools with systems already in place, they don't typically start them. No one knew exactly what path to take, including the local Superintendent of Schools. He was an administrator in the true sense of the word" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17,

2006). The University had a great College of Education, a great management school, a great psychology department, but they didn't know how to start a school (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

The experience of doing this at the University was like creating a whole new learning effort (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). The University System had a broad vision of what this school could be. The Chancellor envisioned a quality operation with the latest findings being used and the accountability of hard data to back up the notion of best practices (Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006). There were many questions about curriculum, finding an experienced principal, how the school would be held accountable, how the money would be raised, how grade levels would be phased in, and what would be the geographic boundaries, along with a broad range of other issues.

There were some policy issues and specific details of charter legislation that the Chancellor and the University President didn't really address. They trusted other people to go out and answer these questions, and they didn't second guess anyone, as long as everything was aligned with System's K- 16 Initiative, *Every Child, Every Advantage*. With the charter school at the heart of this overarching plan, it was essential that the details of the school's start-up be completely in order.

The Regents were comfortable with the idea, but the bigger issue was enrolling the University campus. There were never any concerns by the Regents about how to fund this initiative because they don't have a lot of flexibility and control in the area of funding. There were no plans for fundraising, but there was an assumption that most of

the funds would come from private sources. Even though the Board of Regents was technically the governance board, all direct decisions were dependent on the University campus, and resistance was still evident. "They weren't against charter schools; they were just busy with other priorities" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

The Governor's Business Council politically supported the consultant as she took care of the many technical tasks involved in starting up a school, including soliciting the support of the Director of the Charter School Resource Center to complete the application and later the business plan. It was natural for the Governor's Business Council to help support the concept of the University Charter School (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). There were powerful political alliances, and along with the consultant, other players from the G.B.C. were called in to consult on the development of this and other charter schools in the state (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

The Dean of the College of Education assisted in facilitating the development of the proposal and brokering talent at the table to show leadership and support for the charter. The consultant had answered some of the specific educational related questions, but there was much work to be done at a University in which things do not always move quickly. There were people on campus who did not know what a charter school was. There were issues related to purchasing, physical plant, and personnel that needed the guidance of the Provost office.

Though the Provost was delighted to be involved in this school, he continued to ask how it was going to be funded (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004).

The financial involvement of the University System was not clear, but it was clear that this was going to be a University Campus operation. The Provost decided to enlist the help of the Vice Provost, who had made an academic career in the field of public school finance and economics. The Vice Provost had been at the University campus for many years and had built many trusting relationships. Through his work in the Provost office, he was well respected throughout the campus. His heartfelt and genuine approach in making requests to departments at the University went a long way towards assuring that everyone did what they had to do so that the school would open on time.

The Local School District and The Public Debate

From the inception of the charter school movement, politics played a prominent role and it continued to do so at district and community levels. Not everyone was immediately ready to jump on the university charter school bandwagon. An important example is the controversy that emerged with the local school district. It is interesting to note that the history of the relationship between the local I.S.D. and the University had been somewhat acrimonious.

The University Charter School was an organization that was perceived by many in the district as a threat to existing public education systems. A state senator openly spoke out in opposition to the school, noting his concern for the local school district. The superintendent of the school district was quite publicly and vehemently opposed to the charter school (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004). He passionately voiced his concerns regarding the loss of revenue for the local school district and the tightly controlled instructional models that he envisioned would become the symbol of

"research based" best practice. "He worked incredibly hard to try and make this school not happen" (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004).

> He was, I thought, unnecessarily hostile and I think he came to regret it. He did not like the idea that we were creating this school in an area where he was trying to do some innovative things. The superintendent felt like we were kind of rolling over him and the school district. He did not understand that this drive was coming from the Chairman, rather than from us. We hadn't really had any tension with the school district for a long time and the Chairman was probably more critical of the District than he needed to be. The superintendent was nervous about it, not very happy, and publicly critical (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

The Chairman fired back at the superintendent's deportment with public statements such as "You don't own the kids", "They're not yours", and "They don't belong to the State" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). The Chairman was determined to make his point, and though he did not view this as a confrontation, others clearly did. The media delighted in the drama of the Chairman attacking the school district for not performing well in low income areas of the city.

The Chairman could not understand why, with the resources of the university located right under their noses, the district was not the best district in the state. The drama of a very public debate played out in the local media.. The Chairman expected there would be opposition from the local school district based on his knowledge of resistance to charter schools in the past. He knew there would be some financial consequence for the local school district, but the cost would be very small for this charter, and the district needed to realize the benefits that would occur, especially in terms of their relationship to the university. The Chairman felt they were opposed to charters simply because they felt

threatened and therefore they had encouraged politicians and members of the Hispanic community to be opposed (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

> The money goes with the kids and if you are not educating the kids, why do you need the money?" "If the kids are not getting a good education there is no argument and the results were lousy for that set of kids in [the city] (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

In the Chairman's view, this became a political issue in which the Democratic Party, ubiquitous in minority communities, was being used as a tool by the public schools to oppose the charter school (Chairman, personal communication, January 17, 2006).

> I don't hate school people, but sometimes they're not there for the benefit of the kids. Big public bureaucracies are like that, working for their own good. If you're doing things for the benefit of the kids you find other ways to accomplish your goals. Like looking at the outcomes and forcing the system to correct itself (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

The Chairman saw the exemplary promise of this school within the education market. "If you have a different way to do it and you demonstrate it, then people begin to line up and say I want to go there….it changes the behavior of the big guy" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). The Chairman envisioned the University Elementary Charter to be the best school in America. He held a high expectation that this school could effectively educate the toughest kids from struggling neighborhoods, with no excuses for failure.

The short news attention to hostilities coming from the school district was tense for the President, but the Chancellor did not feel the same impact. "I didn't really feel like we were in harm's way if we engaged in this process" (Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006). He felt that the University System had answered questions from the opposition adequately.

> The [Eastside] community wanted this school. This was not imperialism. People who generally had high expectations for their children were looking for the best opportunity they could find. This was not like eminent domain of land in the [Eastside] to build a parking lot or something. This was a project that would serve the community and many in the community got solidly behind it. Once the political leaders saw that, they were okay (Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006).

The Vice Chancellor stepped in as the diplomat and brought the two sides together for a peaceful end to the conflict. "[The superintendent] has been around the political environment for a long time. I think he knows when an issue is over. Eventually he actually became neutral to helpful" (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006). The University trusted the superintendent's intentions to be genuine and sincere. "We are partners. The tension made us stronger. It is an evolving thing" (Dean of Education, personal communication, March 1, 2006). It was the delicate job of the Provost's office to rebuild positive relations with the school district and still remain committed to the development of the school. The hard feelings between the Superintendent and the Chairman created a lot of stress for others who believed that the perceptions of the local school district were not accurate (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004). At the end of the conflict, the Provost expressed embarrassment concerning how the System had treated the school district and the neighboring Elementary School. "I think we acted badly" (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004).

The University always encouraged active participation with the local school district, but felt strongly that, to create a research demonstration school, they would have to have autonomy by disconnecting from the bureaucracy of the large school district. You

can not assure autonomy if there is a chance that you will have a change in school board members or a superintendent. They could always move to void the contract (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004). The University System personnel had already witnessed this when a large urban district had contracted with the Edison Schools. A new board and new superintendent came in a year later and voided the contracts and Edison was out of business in that city.

The University had every intention of reaching out, cultivating partnerships, and supporting productive dialogues regarding professional development and best practices. Yet, it was clearly evident to the University System that the governance of the school would have autonomy. However, in an effort to regain the lost public school funding for the district, the superintendent continued to approach the Chairman to petition for the University Elementary Charter to become a district charter. In February 2004, five months after the school was up and running, the Chairman finally said "no deal" and the Superintendent's requests for a district charter ceased.

"It took a couple of years of work to try to overcome the concerns that existed on both sides on and off campus"(Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006). The Dean maintained close communications with the School Board throughout the process, and made sure to include the City Mayor. Businesses in the city concurred that it was a good venture, and in the end, the School Board members became supportive (Dean of Education, personal communication, March 1, 2006).

There were many other fronts that needed to be covered. The Chairman dealt directly with local politicians such as State Senators, and he defused the high profile

argument that the city didn't need another elementary school within a neighborhood that had a National Blue Ribbon School two blocks away. His prior experience with school reform taught him that support is always limited, and the opposition seems limitless (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). He seemed to see himself as a "Lonestar" reformer when everyone else was trying to defend the status quo. "If you have educated 100 kids you have saved their lives. How can you argue with several hundred kids doing better? How can you talk about the school system loosing money? It comes right down to the kids"(Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). The Chairman was passionate about results, and he believed that the academic success of children is critical. He never forgot about them in his public debate and discourse.

Public hearings were held in early September. A neighboring elementary school was located close to the site and was immediately ready to launch their concerns. A number of its faculty, including the principal, spoke out about being very concerned that the charter school would recruit their best students. It was very apparent that they felt they were not being fully respected by the University.

The Provost remembers meeting the principal from that school and feeling bad about the approach the University was taking. "The moment I felt worst in this process was when she was there; she was wonderful. We were telling her you don't know how to do your job, we're going to tell you how to do it" (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004). With the neighboring elementary school being very vocal on this point, the University became worried if the community really wanted this and questioned whether long-term commitment and community support was a realistic expectation.

There was a long history between the University and Eastside, primarily regarding the minority communities that perceived they had had been marginalized over the years, that presented challenges to recruitment for the charter school The issues surrounding the relationship between the university and the minority communities of the Eastside had not been very engaging or very positive. It took great effort to convince people in these neighborhoods to consider sending their children to a university school that had no location, no facilities, no employees, and only minimal plans.

The University remained persistent and continued to set up more meetings trying to mend fences and reach a mutually satisfactory solution. The defining moment came when the political pressure was intense enough for the Vice Chancellor to question the support of the community. He spoke at a hearing, boldly stating, "If this is not going to be right for the community, we won't do this." A Hispanic leader replied, "I don't want to ever hear you say anything like that again. The University has disappointed the Eastside time after time. If you guys back down on this, we will never trust you again" (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004).

The opportunity for a "win-win" resolution was at hand. The Vice Chancellor had brought a new credibility to the exchange. "One community activist stood up and said, 'As long as he is involved, we can trust them'" (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004). There had been controversy in the past over the University buying lots of land on the Eastside, yet not giving back to the community. The development of this school was a significant outreach by the University to the Eastside community, and many community members recognized that fact.

The community became excited that the University was stepping forward, and a group of well-respected community leaders pledged their support for a university sponsored school. With this, a number of families became enthusiastic about having a tuition-free option for their kids on the Eastside. It took some time however, to build a thorough and robust appreciation for the school in the community (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006). "The Vice Chancellor deserves a lot of credit for this. He is an unsung hero. His integrity and his history was very important" (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004).

Facilities – Finding a Site

One of the biggest challenges faced by the charter school start-up was the issue of finding facilities. The state legislature was very clear about not allocating funds for this essential component of charter schooling. It was a dilemma that needed to be resolved before completing the application. It became an arduous process that began with scouting for possible sites. The consultant was introduced to a real estate expert who, after years of service at the University and the System, had negotiated land deals for both. They drove around the Eastside looking at over forty different possible sites. From shopping centers to raw land near the University softball fields, they inspected every possible University site available.

Criteria needed to be in place to make an appropriate selection. The mission of the school was clearly intended to serve a very diverse representation of the population found in the Eastside, and the school needed to be able to apply research-based practices in an area that would provide a good crossover between Hispanic and African-American

communities. The urgency of this mission, looking at the relationship of schools to the social issues of our society, was both local and national. Issues of diversity and the "de-culturalization" of minority populations in the name of public education and economic development had long been a national effort in America (Spring, 2001). In an effort to recruit low income students of color to the school, five zip codes were strategically determined that fell within specific geographic boundaries.

The city had a long history of segregation, and the dividing line was commonly identified as the main interstate highway where east met west. The area west of the interstate contained the University and the state capital areas of the city reserved for politicians and academics, but the university spilled over the interstate to the east in several location. On the Eastside, there is a dividing line from north to south separating the Hispanic and African American communities at 7th Street. It was strategically necessary for the charter school location to be central enough to provide easy access to students from these contiguous areas.

The story of how the location was identified describes a bit of serendipity. With her political connections through the G.B.C., the consultant called for names of developers. She then was introduced to successful land developers in the city, but still was no closer to finding a site. Out of desperation she finally called her cousin's husband who was a developer known for reinventing the face of the Eastside. He had a very narrow range of properties between 1st Street and 30th Street. One in particular was in an old warehouse area on east 6th Street adjacent to the railroad tracks.

The site had been the home of various industrial enterprises such as a "sash and door" company and a boat manufacturer. "It had the most horrible looking, falling down old wooden building; a mess of a site, but it was the only feasible site that we found" (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004). Growing tension with the school district continued to mount as the site was discovered. "There were unfortunate comments about the University riding in on a big white horse to the Eastside to fix the educational system" (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004). The 6th street site was only blocks away from the neighboring elementary school. The Provost office continued to question, "Why was the university doing this"?

The property owner had graduated from the University and had been a good friend of the University for years. He allowed the University to lease the property from him for three years at a modest amount per year with the option to purchase. In the negotiations, the deed for the land was acquired by the university. By doing it in this way, this the University avoided issues surrounding the acquisition of city building permits and zoning for construction by owning the land. Technically they owned it, but were paying a yearly lease which would balloon in 2007. The site was convenient to the University, and quite nicely settled in the midst of a Hispanic neighborhood in the defined attendance zone.

Parts of the Eastside were already being gentrified. With an increase in gas prices people in the city were looking for opportunities to live closer to downtown and efforts had already began to revitalize the Eastside. The property owner was personally invested in the construction of urban lofts, condos, and affordable housing apartments in the

neighborhood. Home sales and taxes were beginning to soar, and the signs of gentrification in the Eastside began to emerge with graffiti stating “Yuppies Go Home”. Yet, parts of the Eastside had not as yet been affected.

The neighborhoods surrounding the school appeared to be the perfect testing ground for urban education that would have to deal with issues of poverty, single parenting, drugs, gangs, incarceration, and families broken apart by military service. But, like other inner city neighborhoods, the school neighborhood was slowly changing, even if in many ways it remained the same. The school became a microcosm of the current issues facing the city and school district and the University, and the school’s presence symbolized a healing of past memories of discrimination and the hope of educational attainment for future generations.

The actual design and construction phase ensued. Though there were potential environmental problems caused by sinkholes on the property, the University used all the expertise of its institution to assure that it would be a safe environment for children. By January of 2003 planning meetings continued to be held on a regular basis with key players the Vice Chancellor, the Vice Provost, the consultant, the Provost and his staff. They hired an architect who did artist renderings of potential front elevations to be included in the application. They also discussed how they were going to make this land ready and decided on temporary buildings to be built in phases on the site.

By August 2003 the main building and multi-purpose room, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and first grade buildings were built on site. They were connected by an elaborate decking system and a covered area by the group restrooms. The playground

consisted of a mulched in area and a playscape with swings. “Everything went so fast after finding the site” (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004). “I don’t see how in the world we were going to do it” (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006). The acquisition of the site seemed like a wise decision at the time since the 2.5 acres of land was worth $600,000 and there were no provisions for funding that type of annual payment. Then, who would guess that the enormous increase in land value would push the valuation to 2.2 million dollars in just four years; an issue that the school and the University are forced to address.

Costs/Funding

Real costs and funding requirements needed to be resolved. From the onset the Chancellor knew that System was going to have to put some money into this project and then raise more. He did his best to locate the dollars and established the charter school as a priority. Funding was always the primary issue for the University. The Chancellor had meetings with the Provost and President and decided to lead by example by putting System dollars into it (Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006). He found a pot of money within System to help defer expenses and encouraged the philanthropy of outside sources such as foundations. With Systems’ financial support and involvement came the expectation of the school to answer to its funding source(s).

The Chairman knew that the funding issue was always going to be there. He questioned where the money was going to come from and the actual mechanics of getting it started. He relied on the consultant for the important details of answering these questions. “Fundraising was a huge task” (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29,

2004). The facilities alone ended up costing over $850,000 in the first year. The expenses were much higher than expected.

The consultant became well aware of the inflation of costs when dealing with the University, since they had stringent specifications for construction. The same construction firm that priced a modular building for a non-profit school for $45 per square foot priced the exact same building for the University at $80 to $90 per square foot. What was thought to be a $500,000 project ended up costing over $850,000. The consultant was inspired by the Chancellor stepping up in a board meeting and requesting a loan for the school to pay back over time. Without this generous loan opportunity the project would have stalled (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004).

With the help of the consultant's financial connections, the University Charter School raised funds from private foundations and individuals. An agreement was reached in which for every dollar the school raised the System would match it by forgiving the loan. Time was spent writing grants to assure the school's start up. Fundraising was critical to the start-up, and something that continues to be a challenge (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004). The consultant was assisted by a colleague from the System who wrote grants to foundations. With the influence of the Chairman behind them they were awarded $150,000 in start up funds from a foundation supportive of charter schools. The State Education Agency also awarded $150,000 in startup funds to the University in the first year and later grants were written to other foundations. "We did not underestimate the complexity that was going to be involved, and we are still

struggling with having adequate resources and facilities" (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006).

This was not a cheap enterprise, the University and the System continued to work out the issue of who would be responsible. "It was chartered by the System and delegated to the campus and a financial agreement needed to be clarified between the two" (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004). There was a pledge that the System would pay the non-recurring costs. They paid some, but a fair amount was carried by the campus (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

The Provost had the responsibility of negotiating the funding. He was supportive of the principal in her need to focus on the business of the school, not worrying about money. He knew acquisition of the adjacent property northeast of the school site, which was owned by a university service provider, was needed if the school was to stay at that location. Fundraising was not going as well as it needed to, and the suggestion of a $5 million endowment to offset the operating shortfall did not get the attention it needed.

A solution needed to be found. The Provost relied on the expertise of the Vice Provost and appointed him as Chairman of the Budget Committee of the Management Board. Together they tried to negotiate the flood of concerns and consternations at central administration concerning the idea that the University was responsible for picking up the bill for the building and the operation shortfall of the school. Many continued to see this as an unfunded mandate from the University System. "Funding was a constraint, and it's still a constraint. It is a moving target with structural problems in the financial set up" (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006).

The state didn't provide enough funding and the University could not just take over the financing. The political dilemma remained that if the school was really going to be a research based demonstration school, then it had to be able to do the job with the same funding that every other school gets. "We couldn't do that because what the state provides isn't sufficient and we have to raise money from private forces" (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006). Though major financial issues persisted, the hope was that with the University campus and the University System's financial support, the school would get over the hump of start-up.

The Application

The consultant on this project began working with a System colleague and the Vice Chancellor at the System on the 350 page application to the State Board of Education for the charter school. They worked closely with the State Education Agency charter school division, in writing the application. Though they were the catalysts behind writing the application, they worked closely with the Director of the Reading and Language Arts Center and the Dean of the College of Education to gain their input.

The consultant was the driving force behind the completion of the charter application. With her background and understanding of school start ups, she was well versed in building a school from the ground up. Her tenacity kept all the players focused on the goal, and her business background presented a unique set of skills to get the job done despite the various ways the University's administration and financial concerns pulled in different directions (Assistant Commissioner, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2004). "She did a remarkable job keeping the whole operation focused and demonstrated

sheer tenacity to make it happen" (Assistant Commissioner, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2004).

The application needed to have involvement from all participants. As the application was being prepared through the System, the Provost and Vice Provost were active in reviewing drafts and making comments on issues such as the structure of the management board, architect's renderings of facilities, facilities funding, and the curriculum. With the help of the Reading Center's Director the reading curriculum was very clearly articulated, but other curriculum areas were not as well defined. The Dean and Associate Dean of the College of Education were recruited to help.

The application process proved to be another challenge in the uphill battle to establish the charter school. The consultant was grateful that the charter process was not competitive like the regular charter schools. But, it was a cumbersome and detailed process which took all of the summer of 2002 (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006). With the University System driving the completion of the application and the assistance of the University campus, it was submitted by September 30, 2002.

It was reviewed by three appointed peer reviewers who had a range of comments. The application passed with 150 points out of 200 and was then presented to the State Board of Education. There was a hearing of the planning committee of the State Board in November of 2002. People were allowed to testify for and against the school at this hearing. The next day, after the planning committee approved the University Charter, the State Board as a whole approved it and the process moved forward (Consultant, personal

communication, Sept. 29, 2004). With the enthusiasm of the Board of Regents behind the project, there were some reform-driven people who saw the possibility of this school, but stronger advocacy, especially from the community, needed to be developed because it was still so new. We wanted to create a dynamics to allow for remarkable services to the Eastside population (Dean of Education, personal communication, March 1, 2006).

Navigating the University

There was a well-known historical crash of cultures between the State Education Agency and the University. Bringing them together was a good idea in one respect, but trying to work within two different bureaucracies was not easy. The variance in accounting systems was only one example. The school would receive its funding from the state and be audited by the state, but inasmuch as it was also part of the University, it was also required to follow prescribed University procedures.

If that didn't complicate the situation enough, the University had to develop specific policies and procedures that would apply to the charter school. The University had a child development center and child care center, but never had an elementary school. Job class codes did not exist for elementary classroom teachers, the University Police had not patrolled the Eastside, utilities for University departments were usually self-generated, the University budget process was on a prescribed calendar which was not aligned to the public school calendar, and the University did not allow departments to have checkbooks. All federal funding, which now included Title One funds, were required to go through the University's Office of Sponsored Projects. These are just a few

of the many examples of the clash between the K-12 view of the world and the university view of the world.

The management board was well aware of the university culture, while the teachers and school's staff were knowledgeable about the workings of a public school system. There was a constant evolution in the merging of the two cultures. Being in the middle of and accommodating these two massive bureaucracies was a very interesting case study which resulted in a hybrid organization.

The university put great effort into accommodating the creation of the school. They knew it was a way for the people of the Eastside to connect with the university in a way that had never happened before. The budget committee of the management board began weekly meetings to address operational issues. The Vice Chancellor, the Vice Provost, the Chief Financial Officer from the Provost's Office, the principal, and business manager addressed each issue as it presented itself. Being the first university to sponsor a charter school in the State, these meetings were essential in navigating uncharted waters of charter school start-up and in setting precedents on its design in relation to the university.

Chapter 4

Creating the Leadership

The Management Board

Effective and reliable management is crucial in implementing a successful charter school. The school needed a management board, and it took about two months for the President of the University to complete this task. Knowing that they were entering a community where skepticism toward the University was quite prevalent, the President invested his faith in the Vice Chancellor, who he believed had the right attitude about how this school would connect with the community. He felt the Vice Chancellor was a good listener and would help define the reciprocal character of this university-sponsored school on the Eastside.

The President appointed the Vice Chancellor as the Chairman of the Management Board. "He had the right attitude, and I think he was very, very important to the start-up of the school" (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006). A longtime colleague of the Vice Chancellor was the Vice Provost. He was asked to assist by officially serving as the Chair of the Budget Committee, but he also worked side by side with the Vice Chancellor in the start-up of the school.

One of their first tasks was to organize a community advisory committee which equitably represented the African-American and Hispanic communities of the Eastside. Here is an account of the first community advisory council meeting attended by the principal.

> The day ended with my first community advisory council meeting at the old Rice campus. The Vice Chancellor and I waited in an old classroom for members to

> join us. I was not sure what to expect and was tired from a day of double duty. I decided that the best course of action was to take out my notebook and try to do some active listening instead of trying to give a speech. I was happy to have only a few member showed up. It made for a more intimate discussion. I met [Eastside] community leaders. It was apparent from the roster that the community advisory council had been hand selected to assure ethnic diversity. One member put me at ease as we discussed mutual family and friends. The group asked for my thoughts on everything from uniforms and curriculum, to cultural diversity and teacher selection. Once again I spoke honestly from my heart and was able to put concerns to rest by assuring them of my commitment to the school's success and the success of ALL students (Principal, personal communication, October 20, 2004).

Other members of the Board and staff needed to be recruited and community connections needed to be reinforced. The University's Vice President for Community Relations was solicited for the board. He had served the State Education Agency for years prior to coming to the university and was skeptical of charter schools. The President felt that his relationship with the African-American community would be beneficial. A colleague was enlisted from the Vice President's office to lead student recruitment efforts for the school. He created a public relations marketing campaign for new students; talking to churches and community groups, putting up fliers in grocery stores and recreation centers. He did everything possible to make families aware of the school. He talked to people in the Eastside community spending weekend after weekend knocking on doors in the geographic area served by the school to get parents interested at a house-by-house level. He assumed the role of the admissions director and with the school opening at full capacity, contributed very importantly to the opening success (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004).

As the process moved forward, Board members contributed in various ways. Representatives who were culturally connected to groups in the community hailed from the

University System, the University Development Office, the College of Education, and the Law School. The Management Board represented the diverse leadership at the university. And, one of their first important tasks was to come together to hire a principal to lead this grand experiment.

Finding a Principal

It was a formidable task to find an experienced principal who would also serve as the Chief Executive Officer (C.E.O.) for the school. There were people at the University who had some valid concerns regarding lines of authority in operating the school. There were suspicions and uncertainties. "It was an issue because any time you have a demonstration school you have people who are involved with the demonstration" (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004). The consultant, with the assistance of the University's Human Relations Department, drove the recruitment and hiring efforts. They put together a job description, advertised the position, screened applicants, and formed a search committee which included management board members.

The prospective principal had a vision of creating a lab school that was in line with this school's mission and the vision of its founders. Her articulation of that vision inspired the university's leadership team to embrace the school. The consultant had to be persuasive in recruiting the principal and she came on board in April 2003, while still working at a local elementary school in the city. She immediately worked with the consultant on developing the facilities, ordering equipment, furniture, and instructional materials, developing curriculum, and hiring staff.

With the help of the University's Human Resources Department, she interviewed and hired certified teachers, a business manager, and an administrative assistant. She had common answers to practical questions. Since nothing was created, it all had to come together from her experience (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006). The President was pleased that the charter school was beginning to integrate into the university, and he agreed that with strong leadership the school was experiencing early success. His sentiments become quite clear in his story of the school's open house.

> It has developed a personality within the U.T. firmament. It is now a star that is attached to the firmament that people have a warm feeling. I remember the first time he heard the school children sing "The Eyes of Texas" with the UTES words in the community center on the opening day. It was a grand opening and then when it rained we all ended up in a multi-purpose room. We had a basketball player attend and the alumni band, but I was so proud of the children that day. They were very impressive. I loved the community pride which swelled around the school. It was remarkable. If we could find ways to reproduce it, it would be good. You've done a great job and have to take some credit for the community pride as much as the university (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

The Principal's Story

The following is a personal account as told by the new principal in an interview on October 20, 2004.

It was March of 2003 when I first became involved in the school. I was aware of the media attention and controversy surrounding the startup of the school, but only had the details that I read in the press. I first heard about the position from a colleague who was impressed that the University was advertising for a principal. Due to my positive affiliation to the University through my doctoral program, and feeling frustrated with the

tightly controlled bureaucracy at the school district, I checked it out and attached my resume to the job posting.

I soon heard a report from another principal colleague that the creation of this charter school had to do with a conservative Republican agenda to support *No Child Left Behind*. It was intended to support the idea of school choice and the charter school movement, and specifically to support a very strategic approach to reading. He debated the ramifications of charter schools on local schools and when put in a political context, his words pushed the wrong button and turned me off.

I took my politics personally, and was very opposed to the war that was beginning in the Middle East, and therefore anything that had to do with the Republican agenda. So, I just left it alone and decided to settle back into my work at a district elementary school. In my seventh year at the school I was feeling quite successful and validated for the work we had accomplished. The school had a positive spirit of success and community. It had been named a National Blue Ribbon School, had achieved Exemplary status, was rated a 5 star school by a state magazine, created a model Arts in Education Program, was a model site for the district's Principles of Learning Initiative, and had developed a strong sense of support and community in celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. I had fit right into this liberal, eclectic neighborhood and was feeling loyal to the public school that I served.

Articles continued to come out. I was given an article from a Democratic newspaper which questioned why the University needed to go into the Eastside, create a public school, and support charter schools. I carried this article with me sharing it with

colleagues. It was effective in reinforcing my opposition to the Republican education agenda, but it left me unsure of the purpose of this school.

As fate would have it, I was called by a consultant from the University System. She asked if she could meet me and visit my school because she was interested in interviewing me to be the principal of the new University Charter School. I explained my hesitancy and listed my reservations, but did invite her to come and talk to me. She was very dynamic and very persuasive, and in the end there seemed to be a connection between us on a personal level.

Upon her arrival she discovered that her nephew and niece attended my school and had heard great things about my work from her brother. Believing in the spiritual energy of life, it all seemed very synchronistic. She reviewed my history in early childhood, special education, federal service with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of Defense Schools, and over 17 years experience as an administrator in the State. She became convinced that I was the right person to lead this new project.

She assured me that I would be empowered to create what I needed to create at this new school. She explained that educators were looking to our State, particularly to our city, to figure out best practices, specifically in the area of reading. With the volume of efforts coming out of the state capital, it was perplexing to her why urban districts were not doing well in the areas of reading and math. She described the work of the Director of the Center for Reading and Language Arts. I remember hearing stories of the Director. Though I had never met her I was aware that colleagues were almost fearful of her intensity when preaching about how to best teach reading.

Some engaged in the reading wars were adamantly opposed to her explicit approach because they felt that it took away the idea of the balanced literacy and whole language. I didn't really know much about her and her reading program, but I was intrigued since I knew that her background was in special education, as was mine. It seemed rational that I learn more about her work, and as I listened I realized that her approach of targeted intervention in reading was aligned to the approach that had proven so successful at my current school.

The consultant gave me the business plan. This plan outlined the financial structure of the school, staffing allocations, how grade levels would be phased in, how the lottery would work, the location, and an artist rendering and map of the school. It all seemed to be in order. It was obvious that she was passionately invested in this project and had done an extensive amount of work in organizing the start-up of the school. I sensed she could be trusted to see it through. With my knowledge of how to lead a school and vision in creating new programs, along with my desire to work outside a controlled system, the idea of creating a school from the bottom up with full autonomy seemed very enticing.

I was then invited to have a phone interview with the interview committee, but was still not convinced. I wanted to be open to the possibility—have the opportunity if I chose to, but had inner conflict surrounding my loyalty to the school district. Before I took the phone interview, I decided to go right to the top and made an appointment with the Superintendent. He outlined for me what he understood to be a very conservative plan

for the school. He mentioned resources like *Open Court Reading* and *Saxon Math*; known in the educational field to be very structured and explicit.

These were not the resources of progressive educators who espoused a constructivist approach. They knew they were not resources that I would select for the general curriculum. He outlined for me the political agenda, all the players and where he felt they were going with this school. He drew a diagram that led all the way to the White House and the current conservative administration.

Being a shrewd businessman, the Superintendent then asked if I would be interested in working with the Director of the Principalship Program at the University to design a demonstration school for the school district. He requested time to create this new position and to attempt to match the salary the University was offering. I wanted to believe that I would have a genuine opportunity to create a school within the school district, but questioned whether the Superintendent could truly give me the freedom to make decisions.

I continued to struggle between my loyalty to the school district and traditional public education, and the possibility of truly creating a demonstration school using the autonomy promised through charter schools. I looked to many colleagues and friends for advice, and received calls from a school board member who tried to convince me to stay with the school district. It was a frustrating few weeks and I continued to find a variance of information about the purpose of the school.

Sitting at my desk at my current elementary school, I knew my phone interview went very well. I had a proven record of leadership and success, and my confidence and

expertise came through in the interview. It was always easy for me to talk about my work as a principal and the possibilities that I see for the future. I possess a true altruistic passion for what I do, and visionary outlook on what can be accomplished. It was exciting to think that this would be an opportunity to build a school from scratch with the force of the university behind me.

The more I talked about what I envisioned for the school, the more the school took shape. I became aware of the alignment of many policies that helped create the school, for example: The *No Child Left Behind Act*, the state reading initiative and later the *Read First Initiative*, changes in the charter school legislation which allowed for university-sponsored charter schools, and the University System's K-16 Initiative, *Every Child, Every Advantage*.

When I was finally invited to a formal interview, I was introduced to the Vice Chancellor who took the lead as chair of the management board. Coming in knowing that the powerful Chairman of the Board of Regents drove this project, and that a special assistant to the former Governor and current U.S. President was a consultant, I continued to question my own commitment in light of my political beliefs. The interview went extraordinary well in that I could not only see, but was able to articulate what this school was destined to be.

I remember walking out from the interview with the Vice Chancellor and stopping to bravely clarify that if offered the job, I would need full authority in matters relating to curriculum and staffing. He nodded with reassurance. It was the beginning of a long-standing relationship of diplomacy, collaboration and respect. It was clear that the

authority of the University System which mandated this charter school to the University within the K-16 Initiative was the power behind the actual creation of the school. But, I was given great liberty in determining the actual design and daily operations of the school, and it began to take shape once I was hired as principal.

University Faculty Engagement

Continuous involvement of the University was something very important to the success of the school. The Dean of the College of Education was helpful in creating the University Faculty Advisory Council. One of the roles of the faculty committee was to broker talent to the school (Dean of Education, personal communication, March 1, 2006). Many national experts in fields related to public schools became involved. Topical areas included instructional technology, children's play, educational psychology, as well as curriculum areas such as scientifically-based reading. Experts were recruited to advise as well as design facilities. They were involved at different points in an effort to build a bit of ownership for the enterprise (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004).

> We knew that the University System was going to establish a charter school and was expecting the College of Education to play a role. It was to serve as a replicable, scaleable model of an elementary school to address the needs of a low income, predominately minority urban school population (Technology Professor, personal communication, Feb. 27, 2006).

Many areas of the University needed to be involved. The charter was a university-wide initiative, and the College of Education would be just one player (Dean of Education, personal communication, March 1, 2006). The vision for the school was for it to be a focal point for the university as a whole to draw in researchers, not just from the College of Education, but also from nursing, sociology, fine arts, social work, educational

psychology, and human ecology. Each area had valuable expertise to apply in solving challenges of educating at-risk populations at an early age.

> At the first meeting we heard that our premier research university didn't have a place to put into practice, to try out, and to model the things we were learning through all the research at the university. The Board of Regents really wanted this to happen, and they wanted it to be a place to showcase all the best research (Child Development Professor, personal communication, Feb. 13, 2006).

With the idea of a university-sponsored charter school, the responsibility for results would lie with the university in a very direct sense. They could no longer think theoretically and impractically. This would force them to identify things and implement things that actually worked effectively. It would move research out of the theoretical realm and into the practical (Consultant, personal communication, Sept. 29, 2004).

The principal was clear about wanting full responsibility and accountability in selection of curriculum and instructional materials. The research agenda was important to her and she sought advice from faculty advisors, but then she took full responsibility for all materials used at the school. When the three-tier model of reading intervention was introduced to the school, the Director of the Reading Center was very helpful in training teachers in the five components of scientifically-based reading research (S.B.B.R.). She was careful never to recommend products, but instead trained the principal and staff in the criteria to look for in S.B.B.R. reading materials. The teachers held a vendor fair in early June, 2003 using the criteria to rate the reading products and make their selection.

The charter school was becoming a new model for the University. In many ways the charter school mechanism allowed the university to recreate or re-define the old lab school concept in an environment that was tuition-free (Consultant, personal

communication, Sept. 29, 2004). There were many national models of diverse lab schools that are tuition based, like at UCLA, and the exemplar of progressive education at the Chicago Lab School created by John Dewey. The University took the lead in targeting areas in education which were of the greatest need and designing the program to meet these needs based on sound research. This was different from the old concept of a lab school which researches the effectiveness of practices on the students to determine needs.

Within the College of Education faculty there were words of skepticism and distrust for a conservative educational agenda. Professors had not been informed or surveyed as to the purpose of the school and its possible impact on their work. It was a top-down decision from the highest levels of governance and many were leery of its political agenda.

> The political background, that background noise that always goes on, was that it was a Republic masterminded plot to prove that charter schools are good and public schools are bad. That's part of the landscape in looking at the job that we do. When you do any research in school assessment, schools that work, and positive climates for children, there's that constant tug and push and pull. So I think there were real political questions. Of course we are also proud of ourselves at the university for being fairly liberal and, not always aligned with what might perceived as more conservative causes such as a Republican backed agenda or possible Republican agenda (Social Studies Professor, personal communication, March 8, 2006).

The relevant question of "whose research" will dictate best practice was a common theme of discussion, along with the controversy over an agenda of school choice via charter schools. With a faculty that had committed their careers and research to the support of public schools, many felt disrespected by the notion of a university charter school.

The principal was aware of the challenge to create a research-based demonstration school for the university and was not interested in simply opening another charter school

in the Eastside. It was important to review the intent of the school, listen carefully to all parties, build a level of trust, and articulate the possibilities for the school. The Principal and the Vice Chancellor made a conscious decision to remove the word "charter" from the name of the school, since it appeared to be an irritant to progressive educators who seemed to continuously stop to argue about the future of public schooling in America. "The Vice Chancellor wanted to get the word charter out of there. It was like a lightening rod that didn't need to be there. It was interesting that the Chairman was willing to let that happen." (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

Forging a common vision and mission for the school was an ongoing process. The Vice Chancellor was committed to the school's mission to provide excellent education to the students served, and to develop it into a model school over time using best practices based on appropriate evidence-based research. The school would be diligent in keeping this clear vision and mission and ultimately knew success was going to be in the eyes of others in the field, not the local administration's assessment.

The process became a concerted effort to create a community: a learning-teaching community within the school (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006) So many people contributed to that vision. It was gratifying to see the degree to which so many different parts and units of the University embraced the school's mission. A number of individuals saw its importance, volunteered, and provided activities to support it (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006).

> It is quite remarkable to see the community that has evolved around the University Charter School. It was very gratifying to see values and beliefs held dearly, reflected and amplified. Even in the darkest moments of development, it is a profound source of gratification for me to be personally involved by living up to

> our mission and our goals (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006).

The school was designed to be a model for public education in an effort to improve teaching and learning. The Vice Chancellor believed that its hope was to have positive effects on every realm of elementary education; including the political need to focus on the needs of the children and families and therefore help all of society. “I don’t see what we are doing as a being a political effort. This whole issue of choice is less important to me personally than creating a robust and positive future for this community” (Vice Chancellor, personal communication, February 9, 2006).

Chapter 5

The Grand Mission

Addressing Social Equity

Social equity was a high priority issue from the very beginning. The University was well aware that social and economic class is a powerful indicator of how well students achieve. The Chancellor did not pretend to be a social scientist, but he was a veteran of the school finance wars and wrote books and articles on educational policy and law. He was familiar with the Coleman Report in the 1960's that showed that modest resource differences did not seem to affect achievement outcomes. He had seen a lot of failed public policies in elementary and secondary education and had read the discouraging Head Start data which showed that gains during Head Start were lost by the time students were in high school.

"Equity means we work very hard to make sure that the outcomes are not specific by race and ethnicity. A long range goal of the charter school is to have all African-American or Hispanic students, whatever the group, to be as successful as any other group" (Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006). As Chancellor of the System, he wished college graduates could read better and graduation rates for all groups throughout the state were higher. "Everyone should be doing better. I don't want this country having a permanent underclass. We cannot have a system where particular ethnic and racial groups consistently have failure rates. If the system failed them, we need to fix the system" (Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006). The Chancellor and the System saw education as a door of opportunity that could address equity issues.

The University Elementary Charter School provided an opportunity for the University to address issues of social equity on the Eastside. “I do have a fundamental belief that every child can learn given the opportunity. This school is creating a remarkable opportunity for young people and to transform lives. It shows a tremendous respect for all children and their potential” (Dean of Education, personal communication, March 1, 2006). With so many children in the State coming from environments where strong education and a commitment to education was not part of the family fabric, or the history of what the families had available to them, the school was a valuable image of goodwill and commitment on the part of the University to make a difference.

“This school sets the stage for people in the community to have their expectations totally transformed concerning what the University can do and how they think of the University” (Provost, personal communication, Oct. 27, 2004). It was an opportunity for people living in the Eastside to connect with the University in a way that had never been “authentic” before. Parents and grandparents began to believe for the first time that college was a possibility in their children’s lives. “The University Elementary School became kind of a gateway to the University” (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006).

There grew a realistic expectation within the community which envisioned that the University Elementary School would morph into the University Middle School and High School. “There will be something for middle school that the university will be involved in, but it will not be through the same structure at the elementary school. Hopefully, the local school district and some private institutions will provide educational

opportunities for the kids in the Eastside" (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006).

The University's commitment to education was important in modeling and reinforcing a commitment to learning on the part of students and parents. Enrolling the parents in the actual building of their children's future was viewed as a critical aspect of this project, and parents at the school were expected to participate and volunteer. "It really helps when you have an educational community that has the same expectation" (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006).

It was hoped that the political impact of this new university initiative would create an increased appreciation for the University, and also provide proof that the university is interested in the Eastside on its own terms. "The University has had a lot of opportunities to show a concern for the Eastside and they messed it up and haven't come through" (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006). "There was either no relationship at all, or a hostile, uneasy relationship. Turning this around and engaging community members in a genuine authentic manner can be a very important vehicle for improving the university's image and its ability to produce positive results. The school will be wholly beneficial in this respect" (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

Then, there is the question of how sponsoring a charter school will affect the university. It may also be a unique opportunity for the Eastside to make a political impact on the University, especially in financial terms. University leaders currently consider the University Elementary Charter School a "beacon" of hope in the Eastside and continue to

question how to navigate and meet the needs for a permanent structure. “We need to continue to be a beacon” (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006).

The Charter School Management Board was committed to improving the school and working to create a permanent structure so that students would have a good environment to continue to be successful. “We need to improve what we got, and it is not going to be easy, not going to be inexpensive” (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006). “There is a very good feeling in the University community about it now and that secures the school, but there remain open questions about physical facilities” (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006). To complete this project and build a permanent school building would take much planning and financial support from the University. As proposals for this began to move forward, discussion continued on middle school options while others even theorized about replication of the demonstration school’s model.

Hopes of Replication

The Chairman had a history of promoting charter school development and improvement, and he had nudged a number of charter schools into replication and national recognition. What started in one charter academy began a revolution which became the major story of success for charter schools. “That’s why we brought it up to the Academy’s Director. We wanted an example” (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

It was a passionate intent of the Chairman to find charter schools that could demonstrate how to structure future charters and influence public education. “I wouldn’t

want the University Elementary Charter to be the only University Charter. You could go to Brownsville and set up another charter. What are the systems that can be created to facilitate this culture of achievement?" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

Knowing there is a business and technical side to schools, The Chairman envisions having the business college and college of education combined in an effort to set up a way to teach the starting of and management of charters. Customizing charter schools to meet the needs of the communities they serve by involving community members and bringing the cliental into the systems created is important in the creation of schools, but he did not believe that each charter needed to be totally different. "There are a dozen models that are successful models that could be replicated. We didn't envision a thousand individual charters run by a thousand passionate educators" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). "We'd like to have companies running charters very successfully all around the country with common variables from other charter schools which have been successful" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006).

Replication of the work at the University Elementary Charter School was a vision that the Chairman strongly maintained. "I think you could be replicated anywhere in the State and most of the national region" (Chairman, personal communication, Jan. 17, 2006). It can be very compelling, but with the right financial backing, good leadership, and research- based practices from colleges such as business, natural sciences, social

work, nursing, and education, the Chairman saw at least twenty cities in the State that could benefit from this school, not just the Eastside.

Showing its success with a comprehensive plan is what would count. The needs of the cliental on the Eastside are not so different than a thousand or even a million of kids in the state or the national region. With similar clientele, similar parents desiring the best educational opportunity and the employing standardized educational standards and research- based instructional practices standardized, it is easy to envision that this model of best practices and university engagement could and should be replicated. The Chairman is optimistic that under the right leadership this school could be a "tipping point" in effective charter school development.

Being the an ideal optimist, the Chancellor's hope was that this school would generate a coherent plan and effective outcomes in dealing successfully with low- income minority children. Everything from lesson plans, materials, various assessments, and community building, and parental involvement exercises could be blended in a universal recipe for school success. The goal was to develop scholarly papers that would disseminate the model in an intelligible way that would work even in less gifted hands (Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006). The vision should include seeing low- income African -American students become math majors and obtain PhDs at the rate of white counterparts, to increasing the pool of competent teachers, and to increasing research in education would be the as ideal outcomes.

Defining the scope of the University's vision was an important consideration. How to scale it up to make it work on a broad scale to reform public education was

definitely on the agenda for the Chancellor. “Well let’s do this across Pennsylvania or New Jersey or Iowa or Florida” (Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006). It could be an example, a national model for reform. It can be a remarkable journey (Dean of Education, personal communication, March 1, 2006).

The University wanted to address issues in the public schools by engaging in authentic research at the community level. It was not very common to see articles at the University which addressed issues in specific local school districts, but the charter school research offered this opportunity. Though it would take time to generate results and begin, the dissemination of information, scaling up, and working through the transitions from progressive development of the University Elementary School was very important to both the System and the University. “The main product of the school is success in the population that it serves and what can be transferred out of the story. People are looking for what can work in these schools” (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

The President knew that the charter movement was highly irregular and that there were people within the national charter movement who would like to see this school make an impact, but his priority was for the University to build confidence that success can be met with kids with this level of preparation from families with this kind of income and prove it can happen (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006). “The University Elementary School will show that new ways of organizing and the freedom to do so can produce outstanding results” (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006). “Assuming that we develop a record of success, others would look at the

University Elementary School in earnest for best practices. The impact will be on the world of education. In our city, in the state, and nation educators will ask "What things have you done that we can take" (Vice Provost, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2006).

The Principal's View

This is the principal's personal view of the mission of the University Elementary Charter School shared in a personal interview on October 20, 2004.

The mission of this school is a grand one! It holds the hope of academic success for students and their families in an area of the city that has struggled for many years. It includes the opportunity for consultation with the best and brightest minds from the University to help solve issues of urban education. The school is intended to be a showcase of scientifically-based research and practice implemented by a highly qualified cadre of teachers.

It is a training ground for university students and interns to learn best practice and holds the vision of disseminating this practice to the educational community at- large. It was born out of passion for choice, autonomy, and efficiency from a conservative party whose agenda included charter school development, scientifically- based reading methods, and K-16 initiatives to help improve the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged, minority students on state- mandated assessments.

What I bring to this grand mission is an ability to inspire, encourage, and set the stage for greatness. My goal is clearly directed to the ultimate mission: academic achievement for all. As a lead manager, I am intent on facilitating decision- making. I believe in the power of the Accelerated Schools Movement and the work of Hank Levin.

Three basic beliefs that I espouse are unity of purpose, empowerment coupled with responsibility, and building from strengths. I am well- versed in creating systems that facilitate communication and decision- making; hoping to creating new conceptual models of how best to address the needs of the school.

The highest priority will continue to be given to teaching and learning, and a diagnostic-prescriptive approach will always be used. Data analysis, strategic planning, and parent outreach are all essential in addressing achievement. There is a need for a clear road map to success, and the campus' Education Plan will be the means by which the campus will articulate its goals and objectives to meet desired outcomes. The development of this will include full participation of the staff and community.

An important tool for organizing the work of the school will be a yearly calendar of events which will include events, meetings, deadlines, and celebrations. This will give order to the year and pace the work. Forums for dialogue and decision- making will include grade- level meetings, team leader meetings, faculty meetings, Education Council, Parent Forum, Management Board, and child support meetings. What ever the issue, there will always be a time and place to discuss it openly, to gather data, and recommend a solutions. Parents and staff will feel empowered in being part of the decision-making. Throughout the organization, procedures and routines will be established to ensure continuous quality assurance measures and effective results. My intent is to bring pride and distinction to this school as a research- based demonstration school for the University.

The Curriculum

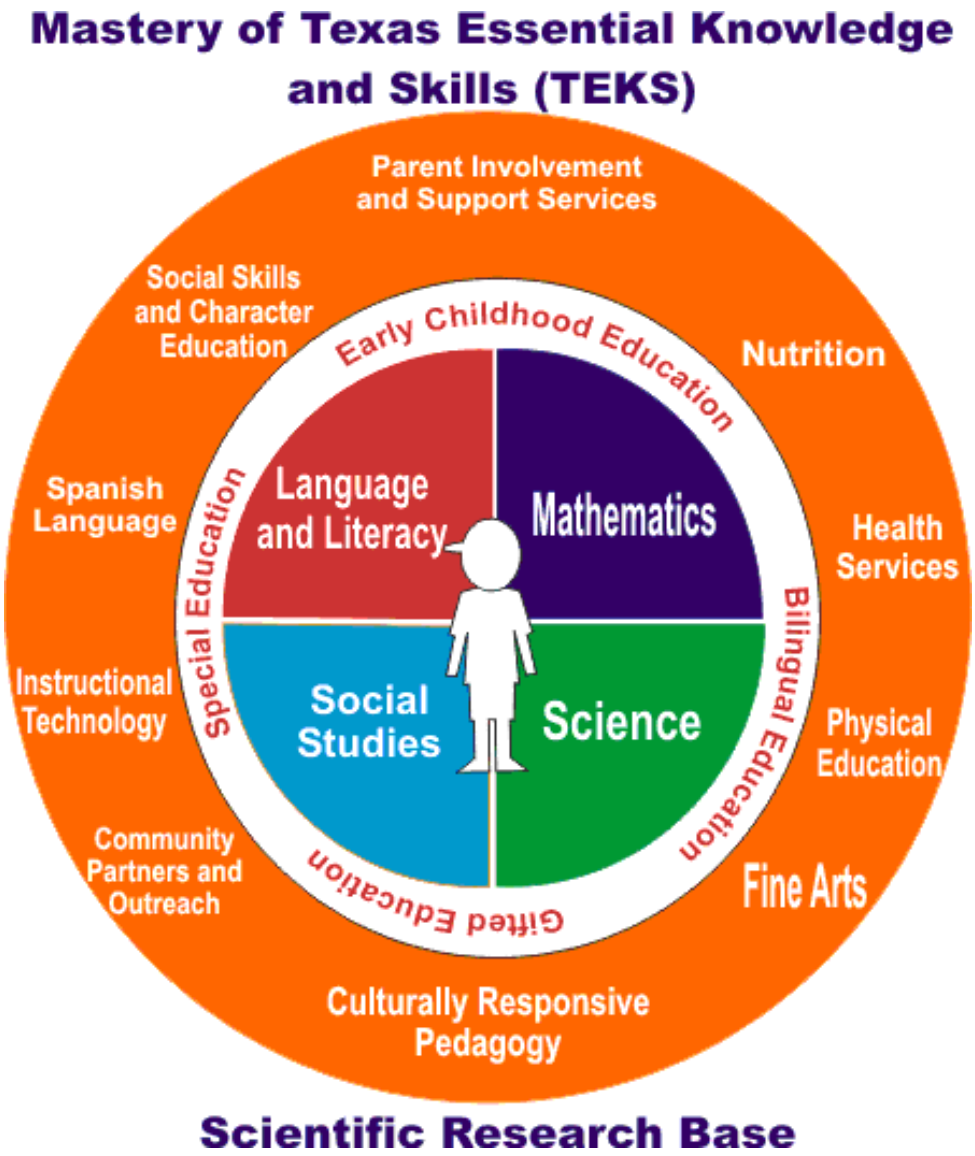
The principal spent the summer of 2003 inviting various faculty, staff, community organizations and business partners to create a model for a comprehensive school program. "I became engaged when the new executive director for the school was appointed. She was a real leader in terms of using technology and integrating technology, our visions were very, very similar in terms of the importance of the role that technology can play to enhance the quality of learning" (Technology Professor, personal communication, Feb. 27, 2006).

Faculty members from a variety of Colleges within the University joined in. They included the College of Social Work, School of Fine Arts, Nursing, Natural Sciences, Communication, and Education. Curriculum to promote character education, instructional technology, cultural diversity, health and nutrition, and Spanish language were all outlined along with the core curriculum of language arts, math, science and social studies. Parental outreach efforts were defined through social work and educational psychology, as well as and programs to support special populations such as ESL, bilingual, gifted and talented, and special education. The purposes and workings of these efforts were clearly articulated by the faculty and staff of the school.

In a few short months an interdisciplinary model that appeared to truly extend the original intent of the System's K-16 plan was created. With academic achievement at its core and a notion of teaching to the spirit of the individual child, the charter school quickly evolved into a humanistic model that was coupled with a diagnostic prescriptive

instructional program based on student needs. The comprehensive curriculum is demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Comprehensive Curriculum



> The school was created with the mission to use the best research based interventions to meet the challenges of educating children from different low social economic culture backgrounds, to be able to follow the children's progress, and to see which methods would be the best for meeting their needs in this changing environment of education in the United States. There are careful attempts to teach to every single child and to monitor the progress of every child (Speech Professor, personal communication, Feb. 22, 2006).

Hiring Teachers

Hiring teachers is a delicate task for any principal. The principal had experience hiring quality teachers, but knew that this school would be unique. Her first move at staffing was to recruit two extraordinary primary teachers that she had worked with at her current elementary school. These teachers had demonstrated exemplary performance in strategic interventions with children. They were both experienced in regular education, but were trained and certified special education teachers. They were the most organized, dedicated and nurturing teachers that the principal knew. She invited them to dinner and later into her office to show them the business plan and ask, "How are we going to do this?" They were trusted employees, and, with their positive spirits and seasoned experience on board, a new sense of teamwork was created and the principal had no doubts about moving forward.

Good teachers are hard to find, great teachers are even harder. Of those who begin teaching, about one in five leaves after three years in the classroom (McEwan, 2002). Most administrators would tell you that interviewing and selecting teachers is the most important task they have. Stepping up to the expectations of the University, and the combined vision of its founders, was a heavy weight of responsibility. The list of enticements to offer new teachers had to compete with the local school district. The

school offered an education benefit at the University, eight additional days paid beyond the local school districts, and $2,000 stipends for additional certifications.

The University Elementary did not need good teachers, it needed showcase teachers, so the principal was always on her toes looking for exceptional talent. She needed highly intelligent individuals, who had a real thirst for inquiry and creative problem- solving. Teachers needed to be masters of their craft, knowing how to effectively conduct a curriculum, diagnosing student deficits and prescribing interventions from a variety of instructional methodologies.

It was important to this principal that teachers were organized as well as creative, but most of all, that they were needed to be good communicators with excellent interpersonal skills in all dealings with co-workers, parents, and students. The principal looked for teachers who embraced the playful nature of childhood, understood and respected children as individual learners, and could create an environment to assure their academic success and emotional stability.

Assuming that the majority of children from the attendance area would need bilingual services, she set out to hire the best bilingual teachers she could find. She worked closely with the University's Human Resources Department. Not only did job descriptions need to be created and posted, but since U.T. had never hired elementary teachers, job class codes needed to also be created. She chose to recruit another former co-worker who had been on leave to finish her graduate work. She was introduced to a seasoned early childhood specialist by a faculty advisor in the Human Development Department, and found a third bilingual teacher at a district job fair.

Two other bilingual teachers were recommended by a principal colleague. Each of these educators, along with music, art, and physical education specialists were invited to participate in interviews at the University. Together with the Human Resources Director and a professor from the College of Education, a team of six classroom teachers, one special education teacher, and three specialists were hired as the first faculty of the University Elementary School.

Finding staff members who have the "staying power" to remain in an altered environment such as the University Elementary Charter School was an ongoing process. There was turnover of staff even after the first year of operation. The pressure of operating the school during the start- up had its toll. One professor was quoted as saying "we are building the ship as we are driving the ship". After the first year, four of the ten teachers hired had resigned. One to have a baby, one to move to full time work, but two were clearly not meeting the requirements of the school's mission, plus the high expectations of the principal. In the second year new teachers were hired, but two more of the original teachers resigned. Eventually, in this kind of situation, a stable core of professionals will take hold and bouy the ship.

What brings teachers to a research based demonstration university charter school? When asked in interviews, what attracted them to the University Elementary School, participants in this study were overwhelmingly drawn to its affiliation with the University. Most had graduated from the University or were local supporters, and with the reputation of the University behind the school they were convinced that it would be a quality experience. There was a sense of prestige in being affiliated with this school.

Some spoke of quality resources, quality leadership in the principal, but others of the quality of the staff that they would be "honored" to teach with at the school.

Teachers stressed that coming to the school was an opportunity. It was an opportunity to try something new, an opportunity for career advancement, an opportunity for a challenge and experience, and an opportunity to apply new ideas. This school represented an opportunity to grow professionally, both in practice and in pursuit of a graduate degree. "This was a good place to work and grow" (Teacher 1-2, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2006).

The President of the University told the first group of teachers that the school reminded him of frigates that went out before the battleships. This analogy reinforced the pioneer spirit of this new innovative school. The innovative nature of a research- based demonstration school, the potential of its mission to make a difference on the Eastside, the small size and sense of community, and the joy of creating something new from the bottom up drew teachers with that same pioneer spirit.

> I was excited that things we were doing in the classroom were research based and that the school was so well put together. There were so many different facets coming into the school. The whole child was being addressed….cultivating their minds, but also their bodies; feeding their character….there was an emphasis on great teaching (Teacher 2-2, personal communication, Feb. 24, 2006).

These were teachers who loved their work, wanted to make a difference in public education and had grown tired of a system that was not serving all the children or respecting teachers' expertise. "This was a new opportunity in which you could take my vision of what I believed was best for kids" (Reading Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 1, 2006).

The type of teacher that was drawn to the University Elementary Charter School was enticed by the notion of freedom; freedom to experiment in new ways, freedom of decision making, and to implement new research. “In the school district there was a lot of pressure on teachers, yet they were not having the opportunity to give input about the curriculum. They did not take into consideration what the teachers had learned” (Teacher 1-1, personal communication, Jan. 30, 2006). This charter school was a means to embody the ideal teaching methods learned at the University and create models of teaching for a diverse group of students. Teachers were invited to share their knowledge and build the program.

> There was a huge disparity between what I learned in graduate and undergraduate school about what quality [physical] education should look like. This school being designated as a research-based school would make it much more likely that I could take what I learned and actually implement it the way it’s suppose to be…..I want to be able to teach the way I learned to teach (P.E. Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2006).

Chapter 6

A Day in the Life

The most significant way to understand the culture of the University Elementary Charter School is to live within it each school day. The genuine sense of order and caring is played out in the lived realities of the students, parents, teachers, and staff. This is portrayed in the following story about a day in the life of the school. It is authentic in its description of the orderly daily routine of the school, but also in the climate of caring and respect, and democratic mission that emerged in the first three years of operation.

A Day in the Life of the University Elementary Charter School

Jerry pulls up for work as the sun is rising. It is 6:30 a.m. and the grounds of the school are silent as he unlocks the classroom doors, puts up the flags, and sets up the cafeteria for breakfast and assembly. As the school's custodian, his job is to make the school literally shine. Knowing the importance of a "showcase" school, he attends to every detail as he prepares for the school day.

Parents begin to slowly pull up into the long front driveway as early at 7:00 a.m. knowing that they will have to wait in their cars until 7:15 when the front doors are open. As Jerry opens the blinds in the cafeteria he sees two students sitting on the front steps. It frustrates him to see children dropped off in the front of the school so early, but he knows the principal's expectation that the safety and security of the children must be of primary importance, so he and moves quickly to open the front door and let Maria and her little brother Nick into the building.

Maria is welcomed with a smile and Nick is asked if he wants to help Jerry open the blinds. It is clear that these kids take pride in their school, and this is an opportunity for them to participate in caring for it. As Jerry and Nick talk about the university football team's close win over the weekend, Estela the breakfast monitor arrives. This signals the unlocking of the front doors and the beginning of more students arrivingl.

Estela is a parent who grew up in the neighborhood. As a single mother, she is grateful for the extra pay she gets as a breakfast monitor before she goes to work in a local jewelry factory. She takes great pride in her leadership position when she is referred to as a teacher. She assures that the table is wiped down, sets up for breakfast and prepares the breakfast cards for distribution. Her daughter Ester knows the routine and begins to help her mother put cones with teacher's names written on them onto the cafeteria floor. Boxes of books are put in front of each cone. Students steadily come in, get a book, and sit behind their homeroom teacher's name.

Alia and Emily are third graders. They have been at the school since first grade and are very familiar with morning procedures. The routine and predictability found at school provides a sense of security in their complex young lives and they are grateful for the consistency. The young girls have had their breakfast, and they immediately get books from the 3rd grade box and begin to read. Some of the books have circulated through the students for the last three years and are torn. Alia brings a paperback picture book on sharks to Miss Estela because the cover has fallen off.

Estela is busy handing out breakfast cards and directing students to get in line, but she says "thank-you" and puts the tattered book aside as she looks to see if the caterers

have arrived to set up breakfast. Today, they are serving bean and cheese tacos, sliced oranges and milk. The tacos have been put in the warmers and the milk has been unloaded on to the long plastic serving table. It is 7:20 a.m. and the twenty or so students who have already arrived begin scanning their breakfast card, filling their plates, and moving to the long cafeteria table to eat.

The noise level slowly begins to build as more and more students enter. Estela welcomes students by saying, “Good morning mija” or “mijo”, “How are you doing today”, or “It is good to see you.” Students are either eating at the long cafeteria table or have sat on the floor to read or talk with other students. The sound of words in patterns being read by student partners adds a rhythmic hum to the room. Friends are happy to see each other as they talk, giggle and share pictures from their books and treasures from their backpacks. Teachers are happy to see students, they talk to parents, and also have conversations with each other.

The second grade teachers are on “morning duty.” Mrs. Petty and Mr. Rocha are there to supervise more than fifty students who have arrived. They hug and greet students as they enter calling many of them by their first names. They walk between the students sitting on the floor and stop to ask questions such as, “What are you reading?” or “Are you enjoying that book?” As a group of kindergarten students begin to squabble over a book on trucks, Mrs. Petty decides to sit down on the floor and read the book to them herself. They have a look of excitement from getting this kind of attention. The demeanor of this lean African-American teacher is kind and gentle, and her consistent grace and confidence indicates her strength as a teacher leader. They know her by name because

they see her often when their teacher, Mr. Smith, takes them to her class once a week for "buddy reading."

Mr. Rocha is happy to see Mrs. Trejo and Ms. Ngyuen arrive. It is time for all the classroom teachers to be on duty. The room begins to fill with students, parents, teachers, as well as student teachers, interns, and often supervising professors from the university.. The books are pulled from the boxes, and there is consistent rhythmic sound of decoding words as fingers touch words in order to sound out and read stories. Parents stop in to leave a note or message with teachers. The money for the first grade field trip is due today and one mother stops to explain that she does not have the money to pay. She is reassured by the assistant principal that the school will cover her child's expenses for the field trip since the upcoming trip to the zoo is an extension of their science unit on habitats. The mother is relieved that her son will be included and leaves with a smile.

The school day begins similarly each morning; an empty room soon swells to capacity with a sea of orange and white uniform shirts. The resounding din of young voices rises as they practice reading skills, and adults voices can be heard as the staff attends to early morning business. The atmosphere is warm, friendly, and welcoming. The regimen begins early with a group of ten students lined up at the back door to go with the reading specialist. Her schedule is tight so she has arranged for them to see her first thing in the morning. The clustering of targeted students for additional reading practice is a common practice, and all instructional time is viewed as precious. The reading teacher adds to the twenty minute decoding practice by providing an early morning snack, a warm hug, and an encouraging smile.

The principal arrives to begin the morning assembly ceremony which is the same each day. The portable microphone system is turned on and she stands with a glow of excitement hoping to inspire the entire community to "do their best." "Good Morning Little Lions!" she yells out like a head cheerleader. The students respond with a loud, "Good Morning." She tells them how happy she is to see them and asks, "Are you ready to learn today?" She will take nothing less than "yes" for an answer and directs them by saying, "One, sitting up, two hands in your lap, and three mouths closed and ready to listen." She asks if they are ready to listen and then defines what listening is by telling them that it means "your eyes should be on the speaker." "Thank you for doing such a good job. I am so proud to be your principal. Do you know how much we love you?" she asks.

The students respond by sitting up in their distinct class lines and show the principal what listening looks like. The principal then asks, "Did you do your homework last night?" She tells the group that homework is the practice that they need to be a good student. She reminds them that it is their job as a student to be ready for school each day and she asks particularly about reading. "Did you read last night?" "You must read every night." "It is important for you to do what? As she moves her hands up to make a snapping noise, the entire student body replies with a resounding "practice, practice, practice." She reminds them of the university's football team and asks students how the team became so good. A boy in the crowd of students raises his hand and says, "I play football and we have to practice to be good." It is a repetitive approach to a very important message about the value of effort that students react to with enthusiasm.

The teacher's weekly bulletin is used as a reference for messages and announcements which are given each day. Mrs. Payne's class is recognized for their performance of *The Story of the Bluebonnets*, which they presented the day before. The entire group applauds them. Kindergarten is praised for doing such a good job of listening, and third grade for being such good role models. Teachers are reminded to begin individual reading assessments this week and to return teacher surveys before the Education Council planning retreat. Parents and teachers are also reminded that the Parent Forum needs volunteers to help with the Little Lion Reading Party next week. Students are reminded that Dr. Seuss' Birthday is next week and that the school is having a Book Fair. As the students begin to chatter in excitement over Dr. Seuss's Birthday, the principal chimes in with "Yes, aren't books great!" and holds up three Dr. Seuss books that students can find in the school library.

Mr. Rocha's class is called to come up to lead the pledge, and they come up with pride and stand in front of the assembly. The microphone is handed over to Mr. Rocha who carefully puts it in front of each student in his vertical line. Kwantay begins with "Let's have a moment of silence." After about thirty seconds of silence, Miguel asks them to please stand for the pledge. Teachers watch and remind students to put their hands over their heart as Miguel begins the pledge in English and then follows in Spanish. Andrea follows with the Texas pledge, and soon Isaac asks students to put their fingers up in the air to symbolize the university's mascot. Then the group chants the University Elementary Peace Keepers Pledge, followed by a chanting of "Good better, best, I can never let it rest, until my good is better and my better is my best."

Parents who are present join in the ceremony, and one in particular pulls out her camera as Deziree asks, “Are there any birthdays?” Two students come forward from the crowd and their names are announced as they are given a pencil and a happy birthday sticker. The happy birthday song resonates through the entire community as the two students smile in a mix of embarrassment and delight. Anthony dismisses the group with a loud, “Have a marvelous Monday!” The students are off to their classrooms for instruction. But, as they go the principal stands by the back door saying hello, giving a hug, a high five, and/or individual reminders to each student and teacher that passes her. The oldest student leaders have the task of picking up the cones and books, as Estela reminds the late bus students to finish up their breakfast so that they can get to class.

The office area continues to buzz with students arriving and parents asking questions or dropping off lunch money. The office staff is friendly and nurturing; reminding students to get to class before the tardy bell. The official start of the day is 8:00 a.m., but by 8:15 students are late and need to stop and get a tardy slip. The principal has encouraged parents to be on time reminding them that tardiness interrupts instruction. She consistently follows up with warning letters and phone calls. She stands in the front hallway greeting and moving students along as a group of parents wait to meet with her. There is a “Principal’s Coffee” this morning and she is taking the few minutes before it begins to check her mailbox in the teacher workroom for a copy of the weekly bulletin and any teacher surveys that may have been turned in.

She pours a cup of coffee for herself before greeting parents and inviting them into her office. They sit around her couch with coffee in hand. It is a small group today,

but it includes Estela, who decided to stay after her duty, Mr. Williams, a local painter, Mr. Cruz, who is a plumber, Mrs. Solis, Mrs. Hyder, and two unknown guests. The group is asked to introduce themselves and soon find out that the guests are parents who are interested in learning more about the school. The regular parents are eager to volunteer information and to take any questions that the visitors may have. The principal pulls out a parent newsletter and reviews the highlights and asks questions to stir discussion. Parents are particularly interested in plans for a middle school and ask if the school will be getting a gym. These are discussed at length by the principal who then asks for feedback.

Of particular concern this day is the issue of the school not having a defined school zone. The principal calls for suggestions and the parents brainstorm solutions. Mr. Cruz, Mr. Williams, and Mrs. Solis volunteer to write a petition for other parents to sign and request that it be sent by the school to the city. The principal is very supportive of the idea and thanks the parents for their leadership and support. Mrs. Hyder then invites the guests to take a tour of the school before they leave. As they get up, a pre-kindergarten student can be heard in the hall crying. The principal finds her with the teaching assistant in the health room. Her ear hurts and the teaching assistant holds her in her arms and rocks her with an ice pack on her ear. Her mother is on her way, but that news is not enough to keep the child from crying.

The principal looks at the clock and sees that it is 9:15 am. It is time for her to be in Ms. Ngyuen's third grade classroom for an observation. It is Ms. Ngyuen's second year at the school, but she has chosen a formal observation as part of her individualized teacher appraisal plan. To observe daily teaching and learning in the classroom is always

the favorite part of the job for the principal. She enters the room quietly, but students still turn to wave and say hello. She immediately finds the teacher's communication log and begins to write anecdotal records of what she sees and hears.

Ms. Ngyuen is a tall beautiful Asian woman who has recently finished her master's work in multi-cultural special education. With training in a variety of instructional methods, she is skilled in assessing and meeting individual student needs and creates rigorous interactive centers and activities in her room. No time is wasted in Ms. Ngyuen's class. She is always working with students to think, process, and create. She plans weekly with her teammate and takes time to know each student as a learner and is committed to their success.

The third grade students are engaged in reading. The teacher has a small group of three students at her back table while the other students work at their desks or at centers. The room is designed with a variety of grade-level tasks which are aligned to learning objectives. The teacher uses a diagnostic-prescriptive approach to her reading instruction. She uses the data gained from the reading assessments to cluster students into small groups and target learning objectives. Through these groups she can address individual needs by using varied strategies and/or materials. She calls her "struggling" reading students to her table and begins with phonics practice using a varied second tier resource to teach decoding strategies. Students are behind and the state mandated assessment is just a month away. She knows that failure on this test is not an option for these students. The State is strict about retaining third graders who do not pass this test, but more importantly, she wants to boost their confidence and tangibly improve their reading skills.

Students around the room read individually and to each other. There are a variety of cozy spots for students to read individually and to each other. One group of three lay across the bean bag chairs on the floor, another group of two sit on the carpet propped up by the back wall. Two sit at the writing table with a lamp between them. Today the main objective is to practice the use of the prefixes “pre” and “dis”. The teacher introduces the sound of each and connects to words students are familiar with. “Pretest, P-r-e test” the teacher begins to chant. She uses this technique with over a dozen words. She then uses dry erase boards and markers for students to say, write, spell, and say each word practiced. Students practice sounds individually as tongue position and accuracy in the sounds are stressed. They each create words on their boards such as pretest, predetermine, and present.

One student begins to write the letter “b” for the letter “d”. The teacher grabs the salt tray behind her and does a quick review of the sound and shape of each. As Joey dips his finger into the tray he is asked to say, sound out, and spell “prepare” and “present”. The use of this tactile materials begins to make a difference in his fluency. Ms. Ngyuen is skilled in breaking down the skill to its smaller part to assure student success. After a few rounds of this practice, students are given decodable stories using these prefixes to practice accurate and fluent reading. All the students are praised for their efforts, but Joey is stopped and given a pat on the back for his effort. They are given a center practice exercise using magnetic letters to build and sound out words with prefixes before it is time for them to go to the learning lab for extra practice with the reading specialist.

Ms.Ngyuen's instructional area is well organized for use of various strategies designed to scaffold the learning for her students.

There is a low buzz of students reading and sounding out words, working together in centers, and writing at tables or desks. The classroom library is rich with a wide assortment of books and other texts appropriate for a variety of reading levels. In an effort to have students reflect upon and think critically about what they read, comprehension and vocabulary-building activities are important elements in each learning center. The classroom is neat, welcoming, colorful, and rich in literature. There are resources and procedural charts around the room for student reference. Manipulatives, games, varied books, references, and resources line the bookshelves. Three computers are running with visible signs of consistent use, and the LCD projector is set up with the teacher's laptop for the class's investigation into any given topic on the internet. The principal is pleased to see a healthy balance of joy and rigor in this classroom. All students are on assigned tasks, appear well aware of procedure and routines and happy and secure. All seems to be in order, and after forty-five minutes of note-taking, the principal completes her observation and walks through the other third grade classroom.

The principal returns to her office well aware of the stack of paperwork that needs her attention. Of top priority today is a report to the State Education Agency on the level of highly qualified teachers at the school. The State has tightened requirements on charter schools to complete reports and comply with State procedures. It is sometimes difficult to keep up with both the role of the principal and the role of the superintendent. As she gets online and finds the agency website, she refers to the mailed "notice to take action" from

the Agency. She is pleased to see that it is a one page report. The members of the teaching staff are all certified teachers, with many having dual certifications in either special education or bilingual education. This request for data will be easy to complete.

As she fills in her name, title and the address of the school, the first grade teachers' pop in. She is with other staff and says there is some concern about the number of parents who have not paid for the field trip and wants clarification on how to pay expenses. The principal asks them what they think. She reminds them of the guideline to use instructional money to cover students who are economically disadvantaged based on enrollment in the child nutrition program. This clarifies it for them, but they request support for Manny Solis's fee since he is not on the program, and his mother just reported losing her job. The principal authorizes them to arrange this with the business manager. They are very grateful and begin to give her a hug when the office assistant interrupts to say that Mrs. Gomez is unexpectedly waiting to talk to the principal.

Mrs. Gomez is invited in and asked how things are going with her mother who the principal heard was ill. She is also reminded by the principal how helpful her daughter was in putting the reading books up after morning assembly. Mrs. Gomez smiles, but is full of questions over her daughter Andrea's science grades. "She received a grade of 70% in science on her last report card. That is too low for her. I don't think that the teacher is taking enough grades." The principal validates her level of concern by telling her how evident her fear of her daughter failing is. She shares her empathy as a mother and about another personal story regarding her son's English grades. The principal insists that they should both meet with the teacher to continue this conversation. She explains

that this is an issue in which there must be a dialogue around the child's overall performance in class, her behavior, and effort. It is stressed that professional observations of the teacher are necessary to get a clear picture of why this student's grades are so low.

The noise of three excited children in the hallway with official "pass notes" heading towards the assistant principal's office distracts the conversation. This is followed by the exclamation of "Great Job" by the business manager who is always eager to do the "happy dance" for students who are showing effort in their work and behavior. Mrs. Gomez realizes that it is her daughter's lunch time and she asks for a phone call to confirm the appointment with the teacher. The principal joins her in the lunchroom and soon circulates around tables talking to students, correcting loud behavior and/or praising them for doing a good job.

As she returns to the office, three students are waiting on the bean bag chairs. Two are there for their medication and one with a discipline referral. She sends the two students to the health clinic and with a sad face asks the other student to go sit in the chair in her office. As the kindergarten child slumps in the chair with anticipation of disappointment, the phone rings on the principal's desk. It is the Chairman of the Management Board who is calling to set up a site visit for a group of local business leaders in the city. It is common for visitors to come and see the school even though it is not fully developed, and the chairman has become somewhat of an ambassador for the university.

Once the date and time are set on the principal's calendar, she returns to the kindergarten student who is anxiously waiting with his feet swinging off the chair. She

pulls her seat up close to him and asks, “Willie, why did you pinch Sara on the playground? What was going on that you felt that you needed to pinch her?” He explains that he was mad at her for taking his ball away. The principal quickly responds with a simple, “You had a problem, didn’t you?” and opens up the dialogue for the student to discuss what he was feeling. With this clarified, the principal then firmly reminds the student that it is never okay to hit or pinch. She asks him what he was taught in by Mrs. Trejo’s classroom about solving problems, and he responded with, “To use my words.” He is praised for remembering this. The incident is told and retold using the appropriate problem-solving technique until the principal feels clear that the child understands. He is given a “consequence” of not going to the playground tomorrow after lunch, given his note to go home to his parents, and shakes the principal’s hand in agreement to “do his best” next time.

The precious time left before a scheduled student staffing meeting is used by the principal to check the over seventy-two e-mails on her computer, finish the urgent Agency report online, call the kindergartener’s parent regarding the discipline referral, and read and respond to the stack of mail found on her desk. The assistant principal soon enters to set up for the staffing meeting on Emilio.

Emilio is a first grade Hispanic boy who is failing. The address of record is his father’s address, but the staff is suspicious that he really lives with his grandparents outside the attendance area. The team has assembled to discuss observations and create a plan for Emilio. The team includes the psychologist, social worker, teacher, nurse, principal, assistant principal, reading specialist and parent.

As the group waits to begin, it is clear that the father is not coming. The grandmother speaks limited English and tells the classroom teacher in Spanish about Emilio's inability to read. The teacher interprets for the group. The grandmother is a first generation Mexican-American woman who is a successful restaurant owner in the local neighborhood. She has worked hard her whole life to get where she is and does not understand why Emilio is failing.

As each member goes around and discusses their concerns, the assistant principal takes notes to create a strategic plan. The nurse is concerned that he often does not have his eye glasses with him. The psychologist mentions Emilio's disturbed feelings when he is with his dad, and then the teacher gives a full report on his academic progress based on her assessments and his daily work. She also notes his inability to focus and complete tasks and shows some samples of his work. The reading specialist presents data that shows he is making progress when he works one-on-one with her. With all this, the grandmother begins to open up and share the conflicts and inconsistencies in Emilio's home life.

After careful deliberation the group consistently agrees that Emilio may be anxious and worried about being successful, and that he is experiencing difficulties as a result. The grandmother is asked by the school psychologist to help provide a consistent residence for Emilio, and the teacher is instructed to provide a reward system for completing his work. The social work intern from the university adds her recommendation to make a home visit to the father's house. When this is said the grandmother begins to quickly explain in both English and Spanish her son's battle with

issues of mental health. She begins to cry as she describes his time in the county jail for assault charges.

With this news the puzzle over Emilio's lack of achievement begins to unravel and the group recommends using a behavior rating scale instrument to gain more information on his anxiety levels. The psychologist agrees to score this and to report back to the group. A meeting is scheduled to take place in three weeks so that the grandmother can review the information found in the rating scales, the social work intern can discuss her home visit, and the teacher can report on Emilio's progress so that the team can better define next steps. The grandmother tells each of the members in English just how much she appreciates their time and the level of caring for her grandson she sees, and then she asks if she can bring tacos next time. As the dismissal bell rings, they all give her a message of gratitude and support as they move quickly to the front of the school.

Dismissal is a busy time full of good-byes and encouraging messages about the good day. The bus and cars line up to retrieve students in the pick up zone. The reading specialist comes out and waves for cars to move forward, as the P.E. teacher carefully puts students into cars. It is truly a time to build community with all students and teachers waiting in one place for parents or grandparents to arrive. Many parents park their cars and walk up to pick up their child and check in with their child's teacher. Students stand with art work in their hand and backpacks securely on their backs. They talk lively among themselves and look eagerly for their parent's or grandparent's car to pull up. The local recreation center vehicle has arrived to pick up a large number of students who

require after-school care. As the last student is picked up, the teacher's mingle among themselves and laugh and joke as they discuss their day.

The principal decides to check in with the reading specialist to see if she needs help with the Book Fair or Dr. Seuss's Birthday. She knows that the task of inviting special guests such as the System Chancellor or the University Provost will take extra time and will need her attention, and work gets done when it is shared. The reading specialist is in her room talking to Mr. Rocha. He is a novice teacher and is trying to build his expertise in teaching reading to struggling students. She shares the variety of hands-on materials that she uses daily with students and shows him how to use magnetic letters with metal stove covers for decoding practice. She gives him a set of extra letters and encourages him to come during his planning period and observe her using this approach with students.

Before the principal can begin her discussion on plans for the literacy events, Mr. Rocha turns and asks if the bilingual teachers can meet to discuss ideas they have about integrating Spanish into all of the classrooms through a dual language program. It is clear that he is excited about the possibility, and he quickly inspires the principal to open the discussion and create a dialogue about dual language. The principal is touched that Mr. Rocha has taken the initiative to develop his skills in teaching reading and to learn from his peers. Importantly, she realizes he trusts her as a responsive principal to move forward on this new agenda and possibly create a new program. The day ends on a note of genuine concern for students, and the Principal recognizes this as a sign that all is well at the University Elementary Charter School

Chapter 7

The School Culture

Organizations

Organizations are social units with a specified purpose. They are open systems that are influenced by the world around them (Shafritz & Ott, 1987). Schien (1970) defined organization as the rational coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of the common goal, through a division of labor and function, and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility (Schein, 1970). Organizations present a structure to govern individuals and groups within the structure and offer a sense of predictability regarding their activities and behavior (Green, 2001).

Hidden within efforts to improve organizations lie assumptions, or theories, about how organizations work and how they might work better. There are various schools of thought as to how to best organize a company, school, or group of people. Most organizations operate in a traditional, rational manner in their attempt to coordinate and control their membership. This has included having a division of labor, specialization, authority relationships, and subordination of individual interests to the general interest, centralization, and discipline through evaluative methods. Managers create theories that guide their ability to explain, predict, and control in their efforts to change or improve organizations (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

Culture

Anthropologists agree that culture has to do with those aspects of human cognition and activity that are derived from what we learn as members of society, and

they agree that we learn a great deal that we are never explicitly taught. By conceptualizing abstract ideas, we communicate them symbolically, particularly in language (Monaghan & Just, 2000). Culture is a complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired as a member of society (Taylor, 1871). Culture embraces all the manifestations of social behavior of a community, the reactions of the individual as affected by the habits of the group, and the product of human activities determined by these habits (Boas, 1938).

There are various ways to approach understanding culture. Where Taylor (1871) saw "culture" as an accumulation of human accomplishment, Boas (1938) described a set of 'cultural glasses' that each of us wears, lenses that provide us with a means for perceiving the world around us, for interpreting social meaning, and framing how to act. Culture is often referred to as the customs and rituals of a society. Culture is vast in that it is part material, human, and spiritual in providing guidance for humans to cope with the specific problems they face (Malinowski, 1944 in Monaghan & Just, 2000). Culture lends significance to human experience by selecting from and organizing it. Unlike politics and economics, it does not have a set domain, but is all pervasive in referring to the ways people make sense of their lives (Rosaldo, 1989).

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that is learned by the group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those

problems (Schein, 2004). It is described as the climate and practices that an organization develops around the handling of people, or the values embraced by the organization. Meaning within the organization, a common set of values and behaviors becomes emergent and negotiated, yet the consequences of the behaviors and attitudes that come from an organization's culture are concrete and measurable. Shared social ideas, frames of reference and symbols for conveying them are indigenous to social systems in organizations. These help members interpret experience, facilitate expression, and guide behavior.

Organizational culture comes into being as tested solutions to external and internal problems are taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think about, and feel in relation to whatever problems they face. These shared perceptions eventually become assumptions about the nature of reality, truth, time, space, human nature, human activity, and human relationships. Over time these assumptions are taken for granted and become unconscious ways of being. The power of culture lies in that it operates as a set of unconscious, unexamined assumptions that are taken for granted by a group (Schein, 1985).

In his book, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (2004), Edgar Schein listed various categories used to describe culture which include:

Category	**Description**
Observable behavioral regularities when people interact	The language used, customs and traditions that evolve, and the rituals they employ in a wide variety of situations.
Group norms	The implicit standards and values that evolve in working groups.

Espoused values	The articulated, publicly announced principles and values that the group claims to be trying to achieve.
Formal philosophy	The broad policies and ideological principles that guide a group's actions towards stakeholders.
Rules of the game	The implicit, unwritten rules for getting along in the organization.
Climate	The feeling that is conveyed in a group by the physical layout and the way in which members of the organization interact with each other, customers, and outsiders.
Embedded skills	The special competencies displayed by group members in accomplishing certain tasks that are historically passed down without necessarily being articulated in writing.
Habits of thinking, mental models, linguistic paradigms	The shared cognitive frames that guide the perceptions, thought, and language used by the members and taught to new members.
Sharing meaning	The emergent understandings created by group members as they interact with each other.
Integrating symbols	The way groups evolve to characterize themselves that become embodied in material artifacts of the group.
Formal rituals and celebrations	The way groups celebrate important events, reflect important values or "passages" or milestones of members including initiation.

The culture of an organization is more about how members see the organization than the evaluative nature of job satisfaction. It is helpful to analyze the degree to which each characteristic is present in an organization in order to get a view of the shared basic assumptions that its members have regarding how things operate and acceptable ways of being within the organization.

The development of strong organizational culture is important because culture serves five useful functions. It offers a shared interpretation of organizational events to inform members how to behave; shaping as sense of identity and how things are done in the organization. It lends an emotional aura of excitement, mission, and motivation when members feel they are working for something they can believe in. It creates meaning for members giving them a sense of community which produces an increase in commitment as members are linked to the organizational values (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

There is some agreement that organizational culture is a system of shared meaning held by members that distinguishes the organization from other organizations (Becker, 1982). Burton Clark (1970) discussed how distinctiveness is achieved within the culture of American colleges. Though strong leadership is instrumental in achieving distinctiveness, the conditions of building community strongly impact the development and maintenance of distinction. One condition is unity of purpose, and a second is smallness of size, indicating a need for frequent personal experiences leading to a sense of oneness. Other conditions such as long traditions, slow growth, high status, and units promoting interaction can compensate for the largeness of an organization and multiplicity of purpose. A clearer understanding of organizational culture clarifies the individual nature of organizations and the factors that make them distinct from other organizations. By looking at organizational culture, you can begin to see the unique feeling and character of an organization beyond it structural characteristics.

The task of the leader is to create and initiate an activating mission, and the reward of the institutional group is to have purpose in creating the organization's

fulfillment of that mission. In offering the excitement and pride of an organization's story or its legends, esthetic rewards of the individual and group membership are maximized (Clark, 1970). Selznick (1957) argued that:

> The formation of an institution is marked by the making of value commitments, that is, choices which fix the assumptions of policy makers as to the nature of the enterprise, its distinctive aims, methods and roles. The institutional leader is primarily an expert in the promotion and protection of values. Leadership fails when it concentrates on sheer survival. Institutional survival, properly understood, is a matter of maintaining values and distinctive identity (Selznick, 1957, pp. 152-153).

The history of looking at how culture affects attitudes and behavior goes back fifty years to the idea of institutionalism (Selznick, 1948). When an organization becomes institutionalized, it takes on a life if its own, apart from the leadership, founders or members. It also becomes valued for itself, not just what it produces. It evolves and redefines itself as goals are met and the market changes. Within institutions there is a common understanding about what is appropriate and meaningful behavior. Therefore, within an organization's culture, acceptable methods of operation become self-evident to the group. It is important to understand how an organization's culture was created, supported, and learned by its membership in order to explain and predict the outcomes produced by the people within that organization.

School Culture

One of America's most powerful institutions is the public school system. This institution has a strong culture of its own which has traditionally reflected the culture of local communities. With added controls due to public school reform efforts, schools have evolved into a nationally defined culture of efficiency, productivity, and performance

assessment. Educational organizations operate like most organizations under the influence of powerful external, political, economic, demographic, and legislative influences (Tierney, 1988). Because these forces are both powerful and variant, there is no one accepted body of knowledge that dictates how teachers should perform, and there is some degree of uncertainty regarding the organization of schools. The school's culture, therefore, is often the mechanism that ties the school's membership together in a shared vision and common understanding of its mission.

Schools manifest clear indications of underlying values which are tangible in their common belief system and approach to the workplace. When simply walking into the main hallway of a school, one can often get a sense of its unique school culture. You may walk into an open reception area with student artwork displayed, parent volunteer opportunities posted, and public internet access available, or you could walk into an entrance that has a huge sports trophy case, with a receptionist behind a glass window, limited parental postings or student displays, and staff patrolling the halls. Each school expresses its personality in its own tangible and intangible ways. Schools trying to create shared values often use various communication systems such as signs around the building with central themes or common messages, parent bulletins, teacher newsletters, school-wide assemblies or daily announcements.

The particular culture of a school becomes visible in its heroes, rituals, ceremonies, and stories about celebrated people, places and events. There is often an informal network of cultural players that guard the cultural traditions and keep them alive (Deal, 1985). However, this may not always create an effective school. A strong culture

can sometimes restrict change and lessen effectiveness. In most organizational change efforts, it is much easier to build off the strength of the culture than to overcome the constraints by trying to change the culture (Schein, 2004). Stability and consistency are key characteristics of organizational culture and therefore attempts to change are difficult even if it would lead to higher levels of effectiveness.

The definition of effectiveness is cultural in nature in that an organization's effectiveness is defined by a belief in what is important to its members (Rossman, Corbett, Firestone, 1988). A school's organizational structure and culture are similar in that they impact effectiveness. A school's organizational culture can undercut effective outcomes by disrupting the school's operation through a negative school culture from members who are feeling dissatisfied and unappreciated. A school's culture can also support academic excellence outcomes aligned to the school's mission. Current research on school culture has not supported evidence that the single presence of supportive cultural conditions within a school directly translate into increased levels of student understanding and learning (Hanson, 2003).

Culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by the group as it solves problems of external adaptation and internal integration that worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 2004). This definition looks carefully at the task of problem solving within an organization.

Solving problems is a key element which unites a group of people in their effort to create common solutions to issues within the organization and to problems presented

from outside forces. This definition assumes that the opportunity for a group to solve problems and the solutions they create together shape the shared basic assumptions or values of the group. Once a value is given to the solution to a problem as the correct way to think, it is passed on to new members.

The climate of today's public schools is one of top-down decision making. In an attempt to control outcomes, the institution of the district is driven by the bureaucracy of central administration. It is at this level that the larger efforts at problem-solving and decision-making are made and solutions are passed down. Therefore, the basic assumptions regarding solutions are also made and passed down. When assessment scores are low, a specifically prescribed solution is made by top administration, which may include a valued approach or resource. This does not allow for individual teacher input in problem-solving and therefore campus-level decision making is being left out of solving issues surrounding curriculum and instruction. This leaves its mark in the form of an institutional value-laden culture which is passed on to new members.

The vision of charter schools was to return to the autonomy of teacher-based decision-making (Budde, 1975). The hope of the University Elementary Charter School has been to implement proven research-based practices, but also to allow for the voice of the teachers, parents, and university faculty in problem-solving and decision-making. This expectation has been a delicate balance between the introduction of efficient scientific practices and the respect for human dialogue in problem-solving. This chapter presents findings from the research and defines what emerged after the third year of start-up in the form of a new school culture.

Interview Questions

To get to the heart of Schein's definition, and in an effort to clarify the culture at the University Elementary School, a series of questions were created to interview teachers, parents, and the University faculty advisors. These questions were designed to get to the core of values, beliefs, new learning, problem-solving and expectations of working within this community. The questions included:

1. What beliefs do you bring to the school regarding early education?
2. Do you see your values and beliefs reflected at the school?
3. What have you learned from being a part of the school?
4. How are problems solved at the school?
5. How do people work together at this school?
6. What do people care about at this school?
7. How would you describe the spirit of the school?

Individuals come to an organization with certain values and beliefs already in tact. This varies depending on the age and experience of the person. A seasoned teacher of fifteen years may have already navigated certain problems or issues in another setting and comes with a certain set of values. A novice teacher may have only her teacher preparation program or general cultural experience to draw from. If a set of teachers come from the same school or district, there may have been prescribed solutions to issues that are now part of their belief system. This was especially true at the University Elementary School where fourteen out of twenty-one teachers or staff at the time of this study had all been previously employed by the local school district. This was a factor

which played out in a transfer of common values passed down by that institution. It was therefore important to start by questioning what beliefs participants brought to the school regarding early education?

Personal Beliefs and Values of Participants

A common theme among teachers, parents, and faculty was centered on the importance of focusing on the needs of the child. Participants valued early intervention and early education as the foundation of a child's experience. There was a general respect for the "whole child" as well as embracing children as individuals. "I believe we have to accept them the way they are and work with them. I believe in the children" (Teacher K-1, personal communication, Jan. 19, 2006). One teacher spoke of the need to know how to motivate individual children and the teacher's role in addressing the emotional needs of children. She believed that when a stable and secure emotional foundation has been laid, children can learn how to control themselves and be successful no matter what external environment they come from (Teacher 2-1, personal communication, Feb. 23, 2006).

Overall, there was a passionate belief in the potential of each child to succeed and the power of the teaching profession to make a difference; giving a thread of hope and opportunity. A value of hope and opportunity for the future and an appreciation for cultural diversity was commonly expressed. Five of the participants had themselves been raised in a climate of poverty and had overcome limitations of their experience through education. The diverse nature of the group brought a common value and vision of a better society through education.

> Every child deserves the opportunity to learn. Just because you are coming from a low socio-economic environment does not mean that you are not capable. I believe in education because I feel that I am an example. Education is the most important part of your life. Nobody can take it away from you (Teacher 1-1, personal communication, Jan. 30, 2006).

An appreciation for the school's role in augmenting the experiences of home with a concerted effort to prepare children for the future was fundamental to the support of parental involvement. Some teacher comments included: "I believe there should be more of the community inside the school" (Teacher 2-2, personal communication, Feb. 24, 2006). "I question how to bring in cultural diversity in a thoughtful way. In a way that is really meaningful to the child" (Child Development Professor, personal communication, Feb. 13, 2006). "We need to embrace the children's experiences from their home cultures" (Speech Professor, personal communication, Feb. 22, 2006). Teachers stressed an acceptance of the parents and children and an understanding that respecting them for who they were was the starting point of their work.

It was delightful to see a playful nature among the teachers and staff, but it was abundantly clear that the majority of teachers and staff were passionate about their work and had a strong work ethic. Many discussed the need to give a strong effort to dialogue and strategic planning in order to organize an educational environment, plan lessons, and assure individual growth. They were committed to closing the achievement gap and knew that it took a focused effort to address diverse learners.

"I know that to learn anything takes time and practice" (Teacher 3-1, personal communication, January 24, 2006). Beyond hard work, a great majority of participants discussed the value of joy and fun in learning. "If kids are enjoying what they're doing,

they're going to be more likely to do it when they get older. I want them to just enjoy it so much and have a good time" (P.E. Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2006). "I am getting a little frustrated seeing the kids who have the pressure. Children should experience the learning. Learning should be fun. They need to be enjoying it" (Teacher K-1, personal communication, Feb. 2, 2006).

Personal Beliefs Reflected In the School

After inquiring about values and beliefs that participants brought to the school it was important to ask if they saw their values and beliefs reflected in the school. Teachers expressed a general "yes" to this question, but with variance. One common theme in their responses was the fluid nature of the school and the fact that "anything is possible" (Reading Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 1, 2006). Participants felt that the school was still evolving and trying to figure out the best answer for what is best for children in school. There was a feeling among teachers that they were respected for their knowledge and beliefs. "I definitely feel like I share some very similar values and beliefs with a lot of the other teachers. Especially among the staff, my beliefs are reflected" (Art Teacher, personal communication, Jan. 26, 2006).

Due to the natural ethnic diversity of the staff, and the tacit agreement to embrace diversity, there was a theme of acceptance of each other's differences, as well as a place to learn from each other. Participants saw that this agreement was reinforced by both words and actions. "Everyone brings something different to this school. I feel like it's valued. People are very professional and respectful and really enjoy each other" (Asst. Principal, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2006). "Everyone gets listened to, parents

get to talk, faculty members get to talk, teachers get to talk and people listen and explore options. Things don't get closed down right away" (Child Development Professor, personal communication, Feb. 13, 2006). Participants believed that the level of respect and learning that occurred among the staff was passed on and played out in the way children respected each other and in how parents respected teachers.

Some participants discussed their responses to the high expectations of the school. "Yes, we are always striding for perfection and never quite satisfied and always trying to do our very best" (P.E. Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2006). In valuing high expectations teachers reinforced the school-wide message to 'do your best'. This message was repeated daily at the school's morning assembly. Children were treated with high expectations and expected to be successful, and so they were (Teacher 2-3, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2006).

For one teacher, who was new to teaching in a low-income school, forced discipline and accountability for the children was not enough. "They are held to the same standards. I think the values are there, but I feel baffled by the different cultures" (Teacher 2-2, personal communication, Feb. 24, 2006). This teacher felt that the work ethic of middle class America did not come easily for her students, but she had a sense of hope that she could teach students the concept of "effort". This was a belief of most teachers present in the school. "With time and collaboration every child and every need can be addressed" (Reading Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 1, 2006).

Teachers were eager to collaborate and problem solve. "I see collaboration among colleagues. We talk about kids problems, and talking about the kids is important to me. I

really like the collaboration and don't feel alone" (PK Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2006). The value of respect for community, including their community of fellow educators, the community of the Eastside, the community of students, and a community of caring and support for one another was an overarching value that corresponded with individual participants' core values.

When teachers were asked if their values were reflected in the school, some had concerns about things not yet present in the school. One teacher recognized the newness of the school, but was disappointed that the school did not have a gym, a track, or a stage. These were physical signs of curriculum that she personally valued. Another discussed the need for more diversity by recruiting more Anglo students, while another was distressed by the limited bilingual program present at the school.

With the reality of state standardized testing present in the school, a kindergarten teacher voiced his concerns and expressed the conflict high stakes testing had on his values and beliefs. "I think high stakes testing drives people crazy, they just think that the score from the school or from a child shows everything. The State Assessment of Knowledge and Skills is the way to go if that is your audience. There are a lot of other ways to prove learning and show growth" (Teacher K-1, personal communication, Feb. 2, 2006). In raising questions about what was not present in the school, or problems evident in the school, it opened the door for feedback on how problems were solved at the school.

Problem-Solving at the School

When asked how problems are solved at the school there was an overwhelming response from participants that good communication was essential; communicating

clearly and concisely and repeating if need be (Teacher 2-1, personal communication, Feb. 23, 2006). Most responded with a step-by-step method to resolutions. “You meet if there is a problem. Find the people that are directly involved in the problem, discuss it with them and then create a plan. You may then streamline it into what’s really going to help” (Reading Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 1, 2006).

Expressing concerns, coming together with the involved parties, and cooperatively coming to a mutually satisfactory resolution was expressed by a majority of participants. Others were impressed by the forums within the school structure that were designed to dialogue, discuss and resolve problems. These forums include faculty meetings, grade level meetings, team leaders meetings, teachers’ goal setting conferences, the Education Council, the Parent Forum Board, and the Management Board. “There is no district mandate. Every issue has a forum. Some are non-negotiable, but a majority of things can be solved creatively” (Reading Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 1, 2006).

Participants understood the importance of their leadership role in decision-making within each of these forums. Their presence and the importance of participation in decision-making were consistently reinforced and there was a sense of empowerment, significance, and purpose to their participation. Whether it was parent at a Parent Forum Executive Board Meeting, a faculty member at an Education Council Meeting, or a teacher at a faculty meeting, The voices and concerns of the stakeholders in this small school were portrayed as being heard, and the value of the democratic principal of dialogue was highly valued.

The importance of the principal in decision-making was recognized in responses to this question. “It is important to have a strong leader who makes decisions, a leader who can make the final decisions and say this is what they think is best” (Teacher 2-3, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2006). “If I have a problem, I want to try to resolve it, but if I can’t I am going to go to the principal” (Teacher K-1, personal communication, Jan. 19, 2006). The faculty meetings were especially perceived as being productive and the principal was seen as being approachable. “We come to the principal in a faculty meeting. We tell her there’s a problem and push to get real information” (Teacher K-1, personal communication, Jan. 19, 2006). “People feel like they can say what they need to. They know she will help get it solved” (Art Teacher, personal communication, Jan. 26, 2006). Inherent in these responses was a sense of respect and trust for the principal having an “open door” policy, remaining non-bias and working through problems with you. “She’s been completely supportive and you know that really sets the tone for problems to be solved” (Teacher 1-2, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2006). A novice teacher responded, “I go through the administration. Anytime I have a problem, anytime I have a need, I come here [to the office] and it is resolved” (P.E. Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2006).

The principal appeared to be trusted for being a good listener and helpful in working out a plan of action, but participants also emphasized the importance of mutual respect among the teachers. “We respect each other and each others’ thinking. We are all different personalities. There is not really a problem in how we communicate with each other, so problems get resolved” (Teacher K-1, personal communication, Jan. 19, 2006).

This sense of teamwork and "coming together" was a major thread voiced by participants. "We all just pitch in and give our ideas of how we're going to solve it" (Teacher 2-2, personal communication, Feb. 24, 2006). "We work as a team" (Business Manager, personal communication, March 28, 2006). "Teachers are approachable. Parents can talk to the teacher first and many times get an issue resolved" (Parent, personal communication, March 20, 2006).

An important component of the comprehensive curriculum at the school is the character education program taught in each classroom. The teachers use a common curriculum to teach students how to solve problems. Problem-solving is a school-wide effort, including a school-wide discipline plan, and support from the administration. Within the character education curriculum students are taught to discuss an issue by "using their words", describing their feelings, and creating solutions or resolutions. "There is a specific language you can use when you're solving problems" (Teacher 1-2, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2006). Many teachers and staff saw a positive impact from the use of this curriculum regarding how students solved problems in their work. "I see it reciprocated with the adults. It takes a lot of one-on-one, but I see a lot of teachers communicating immediately and resolving problems" (Teacher 3-1, personal communication, January 24, 2006).

Since its inception, the school had been forced to resolve a volume of perceived problems. It is the nature of a start-up, but also the promise of a charter school to solve problems from within the organization. "In the first year morale was low because it was just so difficult to deal with all the problems….the sinks, the toilets, the tables in the

cafeteria, food service. It was difficult to get everybody on the same page. We are more organized now and have plans and policies in place" (Office Staff, personal communication, Feb. 28, 2006). From minor problems such as ordering library books and playground usage, to compliance issues such as creating a dyslexia plan or a budget audit, to systems issues such as a school-wide discipline plan and a duty free lunch for teachers, a volume of issues have been resolved at the school since its creation.

How these problems were solved in a climate of trust, respect, and open dialogue in established forums is important to better understand the culture that has been established and will grow at the school. Here is one story about teachers meeting to solve problems on their own and then trusting the principal to support them and follow through.

Last year when the stress level got really high with lots of the teachers, including myself, we had a meeting and we wrote down all of our concerns. The reading teacher took the lead and facilitated. She was in and out of the classrooms a lot and so was concerned about the stress level and finally said, "Well, let's meet." She felt we should tell the principal about the concerns, but wanted to make the list of what was going on and what we'd like to see change, as well as have a solution before talking to the principal. I thought that was really cool. I think it was scary for everybody because we weren't really sure. But one of the things that I was the most impressed with, even though it was bumpy and scary, is that we were able to talk about the issues, and when there were things that the principal felt we could do differently and help us change, she did, and stayed committed to the change. [It was] like the mentors coming in the afternoon and other things so we have more time academically.

I think the overall stress level of everyone is much lower. I think she stuck to the things on that list that she knows she agreed to work with. I think as the leader she knows she has to be able to listen, know what's going on, and know what the needs are. I know the principal has a bigger picture and she can't do everything. She can't fix everything or change everything. I think as a classroom teacher you have a classroom viewpoint, or a grade-level view point. As you get involved in the bigger picture, you understand the bigger picture. I understand how things affect each other more (Asst. Principal, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2006).

Working Together

Another aspect of how problems are resolved at the school comes from the many ways that people work together at the school. This is important in understanding how the values and beliefs of the members transfer into day-to-day activity. Participants responded overwhelmingly that they worked "really well together". Again, there was a sense of team in accomplishing a common goal. "We know that our goal is to educate these children" (Office Staff, personal communication, Feb. 28, 2006). Due to the small size of the school, teachers described their ability to see each other all the time and share with each other. "We may not get results right away, but we help each other out" (Teacher K-1, personal communication, Jan. 19, 2006).

Parents, teachers, and faculty all described the family atmosphere of the school. There is was a sense of nurturance and caring for each other's success. This caring was described as being passed on to the students and parents. "There is a lot of collaboration. The staff, teachers, students, parents, and community all work together" (Teacher 3-2,

personal communication, Feb. 3, 2006). Teachers and parents worked together by communicating and dialoguing without blame. “It takes the collaboration of everyone, we divide up what needs to be done depending on people’s strengths and what they’re willing to do” (Reading Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 1, 2006). Teachers worked together in teams to create annual plans, lesson plans, clarify curriculum, and to discuss what is working or not working. Duties are shared and solutions to issues brainstormed.

It was evident that a strong dynamic of symbiosis was developing at the school. There was a theme of teachers being able to build off each others strengths and compliment each other. People were described as being willing to share, encourage, and help each other. “Each person is an expert. They understand that they’re experts and their role as being expert is to help teach other people how to do it best” (P.E. Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2006). Being a demonstration school was clearly a factor in the commitment of teachers to do their best and support each other. “We are all really involved in the success of the school; making it the best it can be, making it beautiful, and trying new things” (Teacher 1-2, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2006).

The quality of service inherent in being a demonstration school associated with the University brought with it an added stress to “be the best,” but also it added a component of continuous questioning about “what is best practice.” The notion of best practice became a constant inquiry based on the needs of the students and their families. This questioning nature of the school freed participants to ask questions and try new approaches. Teachers are well aware of both the “showcase” nature of their work, and the

frailty of a start-up school, and they were determined to help each other and the school shine and make its mark within the University and public education.

Even though everyone was committed to making a strong contribution while collaborating and supporting one another, some were concerned that the physical layout of the portable buildings hindered communication. The future vision of a permanent building provided hope for the staff to have more areas to meet, communicate, and participate in grade level or cross grade level activities with the students. The age of the school was an issue for one teacher who felt that the staff simply needed more time together to develop a greater sense of belonging and mission.

Two of the University faculty advisors who were interviewed questioned how much the power and success of the school is attributed to its leadership.

> People working together at the school revolve around the principal. She has a solid past with many accomplishments. Things emanate from the leadership capabilities of the principal. She is the embodiment of the charismatic leader, which is indicative of charter schools. She can hug the kids, but also knows how to work with the faculty to get the most out of them, and to make them feel as if they are part of a community and a family (Math Professor, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2006).

Caring for People, The Whole Child, and Creating a Model

This research looked at belief systems that participants brought to the school, how they solved problems, and how everyone worked together. But, in order to frame an image of the school culture that had been created, it was important to ask participants what people cared about at the school. Responses were narrowed down to three primary categories. Participants in this study cared about 1) helping and caring for people, 2) the

education of the whole child as an individual, and 3) with the schools affiliation with the University, the responsibility of creating a model of effective urban education.

A majority of participants quickly expressed their impression that people at the University Elementary School cared about each other. There is a deep feeling of respect expressed from all participants in the school. There is an atmosphere of respect for diversity and inclusiveness. The development and support of teachers, parents, and students was evident in responses.

> I never feel bad about going to another teacher and saying I need help with this or I need help with that or coming to any administrator. You know I sat down for 45 minutes with the business manager the other day and had a conversation about finances. My own personal finances and she helped me out. You know just helping each other out and caring for each other and picking each other up and helping everyone succeed (P.E. Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2006).

The school was described as a team environment in which people were working together for one common goal. This goal included a general concern for the children. "The children are number one; these kids need us as much as we need them" (Business Manager, personal communication, March 28, 2006). The bottom line for most participants was the children and their families. "The parents are crazy about their kids and teachers have to be just as crazy about the kids. When the parents see that, they will work with you" (Teacher 2-1, personal communication, Feb. 23, 2006).

The staff and parents at the school projected a loving, encouraging, climate of caring in which they all worked together to try to meet the needs of the children, the parents, and each other. "I think people at this school care about children. They are loving and encouraging. They care about learning, and I think they care about each other" (Speech Professor, personal communication, Feb. 22, 2006). One of the university

professors described it this way, “There is a deep sense of caring for the children. You just get that feeling when you walk into the school. The kids are valued, respected, and they are liked. They are just thriving in this environment” (Technology Professor, personal communication, Feb. 27, 2006).

Seeing the children as individual learners and educating the whole child was a consistent response of participants as is evident in the school motto, “Teaching to the Spirit of Every Child”. The interviews validated a value for not only academic achievement, but also the personal growth of children. “The kids are the bottom line. Every single one of us knows that it is not the state mandated test, it is the kids” (Asst. Principal, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2006). Educating the whole child was described as people caring about the social skills, psychological development, and physical development of the students.

> What I find that people care about most is the individual student. People care that students are successful academically, socially, and feel good about what they’re doing and have self-esteem. I think that people at our school care about the whole child as well as, which involves especially early childhood, and their families; what’s good for the community, what’s good for the kids and their siblings, and anybody involved in their life. I think people at our school care about making sure that our students receive the skills that will academically and socially get them through their school career and then on to higher education (Reading Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 1, 2006).

Developing a close-knit community greatly affected the culture that emerged. Teachers described the small size of the school and how this impacted relationships. They described the principal’s ability to call each child by name and the impact it had on the children. “They say, ‘if she cares enough to know every child’s name and to get to know us, you know I need to do my best in the classroom’” (Teacher 2-2, personal

communication, Feb. 24, 2006). People felt significant and were seen as individuals with names and personal histories, but at the same time held to high expectations.

The overall responses demonstrated a climate of compassion, but also a structured system with high standards and no excuses. One teacher questioned how to go beyond the excuses and assure that every child can learn (Teacher 2-2, personal communication, Feb. 24, 2006). The personal growth and psychological development of the children was consistently seen as a priority, and learning was viewed as dealing with the mind and then the heart and soul of the child (Teacher 3-1, personal communication, January 24, 2006).

This strong advocacy for and support of the whole child provided a balance between the human aspect of schooling with the production of effective educational outcomes. Under the banner of the University this school was trying to prove itself as a demonstration school with various levels of people watching for measurable success. The Chancellor noted the importance of a caring, warm school environment coupled with high standards. “It fits with my sort of notion that schools should not be hostile places. It is compatible with my understanding of quality education; having a safe, caring, nurturing environment for students and very high standards. We don’t want to be nice and cut our standards” (Chancellor, personal communication, March 8, 2006).

The participants were very much aware of the pressures involved in being a research based demonstration school, but at the same time had a sense of pride in representing the University. The commitment to the University was something that they cared deeply about. They demonstrated a sense of excitement about being on the cutting edge of research in demonstrating best practices and giving feedback. “I think people care

about the ways that kids learn the best and really incorporating that into lesson plans and into their curriculum" (Teacher 1-2, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2006).

The idea that they could make a difference created a sense of empowerment and motivated teachers in their work. Again, teachers feel respected for their experience, expertise, and in sharing opinions. "We are involved in deciding our curriculum and what is important to teach. We are very clear on what we are going to be teaching throughout the year and we do it in a motivating way and also make it fun" (Teacher 1-1, personal communication, Jan. 30, 2006). The teachers described caring about being involved and having their opinions heard. This new school represented an opportunity to create change in the field of education, but also the hope of a better future for its students.

> I get the sense that parents know because we're connected to the University they say, 'my child is here because my child is going to go to college'. The parents care about their kid's education. They want them to have the best because they want them to go to college and succeed (Teacher 1-2, personal communication, Jan. 23, 2006).

This school had a vision of preparing students to go beyond elementary school all the way to college. Children were described as being excited to be part of the school and parents proud to bring their children. Responses from participants indicated a tremendous amount of pride and loyalty. There was a great deal of parental involvement witnessed, and a caring for the identity of the school. "The University notion gives it a pervasive burnt orange background. Teachers care deeply about making sure that every child can read, and doing things that seem very creative and open ended at the same time" (Social Studies Professor, personal communication, March 8, 2006).

The Spirit of the School

When asked to describe the spirit of the school, it was generally described as caring, committed, and proud. Overwhelmingly, participants described the school as having a heartfelt spirit of caring. They once again cited the sense of teamwork and cooperation in which people were eager to please and help. “It is a cooperative spirit. I’m not isolated with my classroom. Every teacher on this campus knows my children. We work together as a team” (Teacher 2-3, personal communication, Feb. 8, 2006).

The analogy of family was used to describe the loving, friendly, open, supportive environment in which people were valued as individuals. “The spirit is very positive with a great sense of community. We all work together. Parents greet each other by hugging. Teachers hug the parents, the principal hugs the parents. Everyone feels welcome” (Parent, personal communication, March 20, 2006). People appeared proud of the school and what they had accomplished. “We’re proud of what we do. Kids are proud to be at the [University Elementary School]” (P.E. Teacher, personal communication, Feb. 6, 2006). “Parents are proud and appreciate what the teachers are doing and teachers go above and beyond” (Office Staff, personal communication, Feb. 28, 2006).

Again a value for hard work and putting in extra hours as if striding for perfection was repeatedly articulated in interviews. Teachers sometimes described a feeling of “drowning” and being stressed by the level of expectations to accomplish things. One teacher described the spirit of the school as like a roller coaster. “Sometimes the spirit is really high and sometimes down. Everyone came in with an idea of what it would be. We

have high expectations and we need to be patient" (Teacher K-1, personal communication, Jan. 19, 2006).

The committed spirit of the school was described in the sacrifice of the participants. "The spirit is loving and sacrificing. Sacrificing on the part of the parents and families, sacrificing on the part of so many teachers in putting in late hours and the money they put into making lessons. They put in 110%" (Teacher 3-1, personal communication, January 24, 2006). Within this spirit of commitment were descriptions of responsibility, hard work, and high expectations. The intensity of the start-up and the drive to move past the temporary conditions of the school into a sustainable organization left some feeling stressed, but hopeful.

> The spirit is one of high energy, enthusiastic, and fun, but I think it's intense. It can be stressful. Finding a way to balance all of that is really important. I think it's very upbeat and positive, but there is an underlining element of stress with all the responsibilities. I think the principal has high expectations, but I also think most of the teachers have high expectations of themselves, and that coupled together is pretty high expectations. I don't think you would be a good fit to this school if you don't have high expectations of yourself and high standards (Asst. Principal, personal communication, Jan. 29, 2006).

The stress of the start-up also appeared to leave a feeling of excitement. Many described the spirit as new, young, fresh, and exciting. "The children are so motivated and excited all the time" (Teacher 2-1, personal communication, Feb. 23, 2006). There was high energy of enthusiasm and a drive towards a common goal that provided a sense of hope and promise. The school was described as having endless possibilities in what could be created and this was perceived as being good, happy, and fun.

> I think the spirit is good. When you're here you feel happy. We get to celebrate things that other schools don't do and feel part of the university, so we celebrate what they, celebrate, like for example when the University's football team won. I

> mean it was very fun and we felt very proud of being part of the University (Teacher 1-1, personal communication, Jan. 30, 2006).

Celebrating success was another important aspect of the excited spirit of the school, and the University's college spirit enhanced this. The sense of pride, honor and celebration present at the University was influential in the spirit created at this school. The University symbols and colors were ever-present and gave a special identity to this elementary school distinct.

> The attachment to the University is just such a 'rah, rah' spirit! I mean just the uniforms show an attachment. They know it. You can imagine with the championship football game recently, they took such ownership of it. It is a great spirit. It is like cheering all the time. There is a huge association and parents too; they pass it on to their kids (Art Teacher, personal communication, Jan. 26, 2006).

One participant described the school song which goes to the tune of the University's song, and another the University mascot's visit on the first day of school. Each was described as being fun and leaving children and their families excited about the possibilities ahead and proud of their connection to the University.

From research to football, the national recognition for the University added to the sense of pride, expectation for performance, and hope for the future at the school. "It is a healthy environment with an upbeat tempo. There is an optimistic spirit that they are on the right track, on a nice trajectory. There is satisfaction, contentment, and happiness that they are there and an enthusiasm for the school and learning" (Math Professor, personal communication, Feb. 3, 2006).

Categories of Culture

After documenting the results of interviews, observations, and documents, Schein's (2004) Various Categories Used to Describe Culture was used to organize the

categories of culture that emerged at the school. When people interact at the school, their observable behavior includes their language, traditions, and rituals. This included the use of dialogue and language that supported collaboration, communication, respect, listening, pride, and follow-through.

The standards and values of the group included hard work, high expectations, dedication, loyalty, commitment, caring, and inclusion. These group norms were articulated through espoused values surrounding the education of the whole child, the inclusion and academic achievement of all students by individualizing instructional plans, democratic strategic planning and the use of research.

There were many values that were highlighted in the interviews. The participants articulated a value for the respect of all members, collaboration, communication, creative thinking and problem solving, plus the joy of learning. Making a difference and impacting the field of education were also commonly articulated values. Research-based practice, data analysis, strategic intervention, and academic rigor, as well as democratic planning, caring, and mastery of the craft of teaching were emphasized. These became the broad policies and ideological principles or formal philosophies that guided the group's actions.

The implicit, unwritten rules for getting along in the organization included an expectation for performance, student achievement, motivated learners, loyalty to the mission, integrity, respect, teamwork, and a commitment to doing your best. The climate was described as being friendly, homey, loving, caring, safe, engaging, respectful,

welcoming, and caring. It was a climate of inquiry, ongoing learning and development, and pride.

The participants took particular pride in the variety of special competencies displayed by group members in accomplishing certain tasks that were passed down without being made explicit. These embedded skills included data analysis, strategic intervention through a diagnostic-prescriptive approach, team planning, annual planning, curriculum alignment, lesson planning, parent conferencing and community outreach.

Other skills or competencies to note included the integration of fine arts, character education, technology, health and nutrition, and cultural diversity into core academic programming. The shared cognitive frames that guided the perceptions, thoughts, and languages used by the members were to be caring and relational, have rigorous expectations and performance, be effective and respectful through strategic planning and communication, and embrace strong leadership from all members. In this newly-founded organization, there were implicit understandings created by the group as they interacted with each other. Some of these were as follows:

- People are to be respected and cared for.
- The education of the whole child is the role of the school.
- Children are individuals and instruction should be strategically planned based on individual data.
- We are here to create a model of efficient best practice in an urban setting.

"Branding" of the school was done in a number of different ways: University symbol and colors, uniforms, a school song, a school logo, a school motto, the school

mission, a discipline plan, the yearbook, a website, newsletters, as well as policy handbooks. Formal rituals and celebrations that reinforced each of these "categories of culture" were morning assembly, awards assemblies, longhorn leader awards, meet-your-teacher assemblies, back-to-school night, science fair, student performances, classroom community meetings, parent forum meetings and events, faculty meetings, and the summer teacher retreat or staff development, to name just a few.

The behavioral regularities, group norms, espoused values, formal philosophy, rules, climate, embedded skills, habits of thinking, shared meaning, symbols, ceremonies and rituals were all distinct categories that were interwoven in the creation of the school culture. Each category supported and reinforced the others and they were each clearly demonstrated at the school. The following table was created to review the significant categories that emerged and how they were demonstrated in the school.

Categories of Culture	***Description of Category***	***Demonstrated in School***
Observable behavioral regularities when people interact	The language used, customs and traditions that evolved, and the rituals they employed in a wide variety of situations.	Collaboration & Communication Respect Listening Follow-through Pride Dialogue
Group norms	The implicit standards and values that evolved in working groups.	Hard Work High Expectations Dedication Loyalty Commitment

		Caring Inclusion Diversity
Espoused values	The articulated, publicly announced principles and values that the group claims to be trying to achieve.	The Whole Child Individualized Planning for Children Democratic Strategic Planning Academic Achievement for All Use of Research Inclusion Making a Difference/Impact on Education Respect for the Membership Collaboration and Communication Creative Thinking and Problem Solving Fun/ Joy of Learning
Formal philosophy	The broad policies and ideological principles that guide a group's actions towards stakeholders.	Research Based Practice Data Analysis Strategic Intervention Mastery of the Craft of Teaching Academic Rigor/ High Expectations Democratic Planning Caring
Rules of the game	The implicit, unwritten rules for getting along in the organization.	Expectation for Performance Student Achievement Motivated Learners Loyalty to Mission Integrity Respect Teamwork

		Doing your Best
Climate	The feeling that is engendered in a group by the physical layout and the way in which members of the organization interact with each other, customers, and outsiders.	Friendly, Homey, Loving, Caring, Safe Inquiry Ongoing Learning and Development Engaging, Respectful, Welcoming Pride Caring
Embedded skills	The special competencies displayed by group members in accomplishing certain tasks that are historically passed down without necessarily being articulated in writing.	Diagnostic-Prescriptive Approach Data Analysis Strategic Intervention Team Planning Annual Planning Curriculum Alignment Lesson Planning Parent Conferencing Community Outreach Integration of Fine Arts, Character, Technology, Health and Nutrition, and Multi-cultural Education.
Habits of thinking, mental models, linguistic paradigms	The shared cognitive frames that guide the perceptions, thought, and language used by the members and taught to new members.	Caring and Relational Rigorous Expectations and Performance Strategic Planning and Communication Strong Leadership
Sharing meaning	The emergent understandings created by group members as they interact with each other.	People are to be respected and cared for. The education of the whole child is the role of the school. Children are individuals and instruction should be strategically

		planned based on individual data. We are here to create a model of efficient best practice in an urban setting.
"Root metaphors" or integrating symbols	The way groups evolve to characterize themselves that become embodied in material artifacts of the group.	University Symbols and Colors Uniforms School Song School Logo School Motto "Give Me Five" Posters Posted School Mission School Yearbook School Website Newsletters Parent and Teacher Handbooks
Formal rituals and celebrations	The way groups celebrate important events, reflect important values or "passages" or milestones of members.	Morning Assembly Awards Assemblies Longhorn Leaders Meet your Teacher Assembly Back to School Night Science Fair Classroom Community Meetings Parent Forum Meetings and Events Faculty Meetings Teacher Retreat

Chapter 8

Reflective Summary:
Making Sense of the Evolution of the School

Education reform in this country has come to a point of recognizing that the organizational culture of schools can have a primary influence on success or failure. This is especially significant in looking at the successes and failures of schools that have emerged in the charter school movement. This study is a unique case of an institutionally sponsored charter school. Analysis of the issue of organizational culture is primary in the review of the values of the founders and the principal of the school, and the adaptations that occurred in the creation of the new school's culture.

Findings in this study emphasize: the need for strong but flexible leadership; the necessity of coordination and collaboration; development of trust, sharing, and accountability; balancing humanistic values with efficient systems, inclusion of students, parents, and the community in planning and decision-making, the benefits of research-based practices as well as attending to the "whole child", and structuring for continuous improvement within a democratic, inclusive process. The overall result of this study was the development of a heuristic model for establishing effective and efficient elementary school cultures that provides full support for the social, spiritual, and academic development of all children.

The Key Roles of Leadership and Institutional Forces

Edgar Schein's work informs us about the interaction among the internal and external pressures of an organization and the skills and experience of leaders to generate the culture of the organization. Leadership defines culture and culture defines leadership (Schein, 2004). The collective wisdom of the group ultimately reflects the values and mission of someone in authority. Organizational culture is shaped by the original values and mission of the founder(s) and these initial leaders' viewpoints influence how they interact with others within the group (Boleman & Deal,1999).

In the initiation of any new organization there are predictable pressures (Sarason, 2002). Ideas for the school are explored and defined by the founders and the core leadership team is selected. Initially, the founders of a new organization set the criteria for inclusion in the leadership team, and these criteria for inclusion are tested by powerful control systems. Through inclusion in the leadership team, power and status are distributed. Lines of authority and peer relationships are developed as the team implements its initial plans and confronts the challenges inherent in assuring the success of a new school. Pressures are both internal (such as identifying roles, accomplishing benchmark goals, and addressing controversy within the team) and external (in the political and reciprocal economic relationships with the institution or governing agency). In the first stages of development, the survival of the organization and the realization of its vision can be at risk (Sarason, 2002).

New schools sponsored by existing institutions tend to reflect the culture of the same institution, which is often quite different from the culture originally envisioned for

the school (Brouillette, 2002). The charter school in this case study definitely reflects some aspects of the culture of the university campus which sponsors it. The symbolic representations of that institution's culture such as the University's colors, song, mascot, and hand signal are evident, and these symbols are embraced by participants in the school.

It is important to note that the original vision of the school was influenced by external political and governmental forces that represented a business conservative ideology. This vision of efficiency, freedom, and order was adapted through the authority granted to the core leadership team, with primary decision-making given to the principal. The purpose of this case study is to discuss the emergence of this charter school's culture. Therefore, it is important to begin with a discussion of the external culture that existed within the alliances of its founders in their efforts to enhance school reform initiatives.

Following this contextual analysis, actual findings of this case study will be examined. Categories of culture, specifically the shared basic assumptions that emerged, are described in terms of how they are demonstrated at the school. The underlying purpose or intent of this approach is to make evident how leadership and institutional forces can be combined to create an organizational culture that is inclusive, democratic, efficient, and effective.

Political Actors and Agendas – The Broader Context

Since the mid-1980's we have enjoyed and endured an intense period of educational reform. Politicians, parents, teachers, taxpayers, college professors, social critics, business leaders, journalists, and researchers have all passionately gotten into the

discussion of school renewal (Daniels, et. al, 1998). Reform means to reshape, reconfigure, to make different. All reformers inspired by their chosen cause hope that their ideas will bring improvement. The creation of the University Elementary Charter School was a bold move towards school reform. Three reform initiatives (research-based reading, the education initiative of K-16, and charter schools) came together for the creation of a new school organization.

The history of public schools in the United States sets the backdrop for school reform movements. A major part of this history involves controversy over cultural domination, ideological management, racism and economics (Spring, 2001). School became an important institution for conferring status on the middle-class. The Common School Movement of the 1830's and 1840's was in part an attempt to limit the move towards a multicultural society.

Between 1905 and 1914 over 10,000,000 immigrants arrived in the United States. In a bureaucratic move to control the masses, "Americanization" of immigrants became the role of public schools with the mission of cultivating patriotism and good citizenship (Tyack, 1974). David Tyack (1974) argued that the pressure of numbers was a main reason for the bureaucratization that gradually replaced the older decentralized village pattern of schooling. According to Tyack this forced school leaders to use methods to achieve efficiency in school systems that evolved haphazardly. Many leaders in the 19th century believed that bureaucratic organization addressed skills necessary for an industrial society (Tyack, 1974).

Cultural domination and ideological management is a mind-set of our public schools (Sarason, 1998). Uniformity of curriculum and school organization, fears of immigrant groups, controversy about bilingual programs, determining which rituals of a patriotic or religious significance should be mandatory in school, and to what extent and how the curriculum should portray the roles of diverse racial and ethnic groups are all issues that are well documented in the history of American Schools.

It is a common assumption that school reform efforts are a reaction to lower achievement rates of poor children of color in urban areas. Equal opportunity and the notion that schools can bring all children of various races and economic levels up to par with the standards of the dominant society continues to exist. The American school system has been unsuccessful in radical reform efforts. "Despite frequent good intentions and abundant rhetoric about "equal educational opportunity", schools have rarely taught the children of the poor effectively, and this failure has been systematic, not idiosyncratic" (Tyack, 1974). Even though the educational system is viewed to be seriously flawed, we have been unable to reform or "re-shape" an educational system or program that would substitute the bureaucratic system that we have created (Sarason, 1998). Continued efforts are made to create one best system (Tyack, 1974) and have centralized control of schools in America.

Schools are critical to the future of individuals and society as a whole because knowledge and the ability to use it increasingly represent power (Pajak, 1993). Reform efforts are often seen as being driven by selfish marketplace values for economic gain which ignore social justice and public responsibility (Giroux, 1991). For some, the

creation of an intelligent society brings economic power (Drucker, 1989) and for others it is the political power of democracy (Giroux, 1991). Whatever the intention of school reform efforts, it is evident that a democratic society cannot tolerate the growing disparity found in the education of the advantaged and disadvantaged in this country.

The birth of the school in this case study is unique in how it contributes to reform efforts. It was conceived through a confluence of political reform efforts, including: research-based reading, market-based schools of choice, and the bridging of public schooling to higher education. It was driven by an economist who was seeking a model of schooling which could be replicated and cultivated in a political climate of powerful alliances, which would assure its creation to further their ideology. Whatever the reasoning in its initial creation, what developed within the culture of the school made for an important case study that describes the planning and resiliency necessary to balance the efficient systems which were required by its founders and the democratic principals necessary to build a caring community.

A Rational Perspective – State and National Agendas for School Reform

Business conservatives on the state and national level have worked to solve the problems of education within the framework of our capitalistic society, and their shared values and beliefs have created a unique culture of their own. This "culture" holds the view that humans are motivated by economic and self-interest, the achievement of material well-being is the primary goal of society (Fowler, 2000), and that individual interest can be pursued by the competing in the market place.

Two major values are part of the business conservative perspective: efficiency and freedom. The free operation of the market produces a high level of economic efficiency. Freedom is not defined in political terms, but in the liberty to compete in business and make consumer choices. In an effort to improve the economy and social capital of our citizens, this view has produced policies for higher standards, accountability in schools, proficiency testing, and school choice.

Another significant value emphasized by the culture of conservatism is order. The business conservative agenda calls for the transformation of public schools into a competitive market in which school leaders are seen as marketing experts. They call for curriculum policy which prepares students for the workplace and focuses on the values of the dominant Western culture. There is a prominent emphasis on workplace competencies and skill sets that match requirements on the job. “Soft skills” are defined as essential skills necessary to function effectively and efficiently at work; such as, good communication skills, problem-solving skills, effective interpersonal skills, and good teamwork.

Political agendas or reform efforts present in this case study were driven by this ideology and a sense of rational correctness and order. The reading research, for example, was embraced and endorsed with the heartfelt intention of improving literacy in our state. Yet, it was a prescriptive model of explicit instruction supported by professional development, diagnostic assessments, and recommended instructional resources. The self-interests of researchers, publishers, consultants, and psychometricians were served in its reproduction throughout the State. This measured approach assured the success of

students on the state-mandated reading assessments. The predictable measures and guarantees for student success were rational in nature and had economic ramifications for increasing social capital in our nation. Taxpayers and public consumers were assured that research had proven effectiveness and therefore a promise of cost effectiveness and a more literate society.

Rational choice theory informs us about the value this type of rational thinking and decision-making that has guided conservative political agendas towards school reform. It assumes that "rationality" will be used to decide which course of action would be the best, or to predict which course of action will be taken. This approach commonly finds itself in discussions about human behavior within corporate business, but what is defined as 'rational' varies with context and location.

The technical meaning of rationality in economics is about preferences. Preferences are defined to be rational if the person making decisions has compared all of the alternatives, has checked to make sure the comparisons are consistent, and has used logical reasoning in the decision-making processes. Rationality can also mean that the decision maker always chooses the most preferred option. To simplify rational calculation, however, and make predictions easier, unrealistic assumptions can be made about the world. An assumption can be made that individuals have the information about what will occur when a choice is made, or an individual has time and ability to weigh choices or an individual is aware of all possible choices. But, assumptions do not always match reality.

Many people and/or situations are deemed to be “rational, which often begs the question of what definition really satisfies the term. Business conservatives assume that people can be "rational" beings, and, if this is true, their view of the world appears reasonably accurate and useful, as human beings are seen as intentional and act on the basis of reasons. Socially, however, individual’s actions are directed by their beliefs, goals, meanings, values, prohibitions, and scruples (Little, 1991). Therefore, the beliefs, goals, meanings, and values of one political culture may not seem rational to another. The rational logical reasoning for school reform of the dominant political culture may or may not be commensurate with an alternative cultural view due to the problem of alignment with cultural beliefs and values.

Rational political actors develop and execute strategies for action designed to bring about the outcomes they prefer (Boyd, et al, 1995). Their rational approaches simplify reality and contain important preconceptions that need to be recognized. This top-down approach reveals the tension between the goals of individuals and the defined goals of the organization. In public schools this may explain the misalignment of the rational goals and approaches defined by a dominant culture guiding curriculum and practice over against the cultural values of varied subgroups in urban areas. Can one size fit all?

The positivist notion of scientifically based research by social behaviorists is influenced by the early work of scientific psychology and the management science of Frederick Taylor (1947). Taylor’s scientific analysis of work focused on formal organizational structure and work efficiency. Social behaviorists are intent on addressing

inefficient and ineffective schools, and strongly advocate social efficiency (Kliebard, 1986) and the use of standardized assessments and controlled studies. They link the behavioral aspects of teaching to test results by taking a close look at the use of time and outcomes of researched methods.

Quantitative methods of analysis are considered the most effective, and curriculum materials and methods are evaluated based on an analysis of documented research. Curricular reforms begin with systematic needs analysis, followed by detailed strategic planning. The main objective of this curriculum reform approach is based on rational scientific evidence that is available (Schubert, 1993). The conviction that scientific evidence proves effectiveness and defines best practice was the foundation of thought which drove policy edicts such as NCLB and the research-based reading reform efforts in our State. It also explains the need for a demonstration school to market these rational, evidence-based practices.

The role of schools in the production of literate citizens was characterized by Ellwood Cubberley (1916) as a factory processing raw materials for social consumption. Procedures for accounting for costs, time, and production were borrowed from business to cut costs and demonstrate efficiency. The adoption of principles of scientific management also reinforced the "order" and factory image of schools as they educated the masses in a logical order and sequence. The K-16 efforts of the University System appear to reinforce this notion of school as a factory in which prerequisite skills in the line of production are necessary for successful completion. Once again, the business conservative commitment to order and efficiency seemed to be at play in the rational

decisions of the System to organize an educational pipeline which would produce an educated workforce with the hopes of increased national economic prosperity.

Public schools are non-profit government agencies whose financial support comes through a political process in the form of a tax-supplied budget rather than directly from satisfied clients (Michaelsen, 1977 in Boyd, et. al., 1995). The assurance of a budget is independent of the degree of customer satisfaction. In this regard, public schools have been targeted as monopolies with school boards manipulated and lobbied consistently by the "rationality" of bureaucrats. Viewing public schools as one of the last public monopolies, coupled with the growing concerns for declining student performance, has greatly impacted public policy and politics.

An output of the policy debate on school reform is the preferred use of economic models to address productivity concerns regarding underachieving schools. The charter movement is no exception. Charter schools are based on a rational assumption that through choice, autonomy, and competition, schools can be more flexible and innovative, and therefore improve student achievement rates. The descriptive analysis presented in this case study informs our understanding of the political forces at work in public school reform, but most importantly, what categories of school culture emerged from this reform effort.

Chubb and Moe (1990) determined that political governance of schools is unlikely to work regardless of whether the public or the educators control it. They contended that school effectiveness depends on schools being autonomous, free of excessive bureaucratic regulations or interest groups determined to advance policy

preferences. Their research added to the newest growth industry in policy design for American education which involves efforts to free schools from excessive bureaucratic and political control, while at the same time creating new and effective accountability systems to harness educators' efforts (Boyd, et.al., 1995). Charter schools presented a vision of a direct service model of effectiveness, tailor-made for American students through site-based decisions and the loss of the cost of the layers of organizational bureaucracy often associated with public schools (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Here lies an assumption that freedom from bureaucratic rules will lead to innovative practice and cost effectiveness.

Weber argued that the bureaucratic form of administration is the most efficient organizational form that can be utilized in modern, complex organizations (Hanson, 2003). The scientific management movement of Taylor viewed the efficiency of an undertaking measured solely in terms of productivity. Efficiency relates to a mechanical process and the economic utilization of resources without consideration of human factors (Hanson, 2003). Charter schools are based on a belief that new and different ways of organizing schools to improve student achievement should be available in the educational market. Their governance structures are flattened bureaucracies in comparison to district-run schools, and school administration is known to embrace site-based management and shared decision-making.

Market theory affirms the importance of variety and innovation. "The "anti-bureaucracy" sentiment of public choice suggests "market-based school reform" as a self-evident remedy to the uniformity associated with state provisions on education

(Lubienski, 2003, p 398).” Policy analysis from this market paradigm of ‘individual self interest’ radically changed the discourse on social policy and public interest. Concern for equity, social justice, and the common good changed to questions of liberty, choice, excellence, and efficiency.

The pursuit of self-interest which is inherent in schools of choice eroded attention from the value of developing schools within a given community. In this case study, the creation of the University “R&D” center was a political attempt to further all the different conflicting goals of charter school advocates. It was to demonstrate the powerful liberty of choice in education by providing a model of innovation, excellence, and efficiency within a prescribed set of State standards and assessments, and yet be given the autonomy for site-based decision-making.

How can charter schools operate effectively under strict standards and accountability measures? When states mandate standards and standardized tests, charter schools are pushed from innovation toward more traditional, research based practices (Deal & Hentschke, 2004). In an analysis of practices reported in 56 studies, Lubienski (2003) found that the R&D function that is assumed in the design of charter schools has produced mixed results. He found obvious innovations in organizational activities, but fewer clear innovations in the classroom. At an administrative level there is much evidence of both new and different practices and experimentation with governance, financial arrangements, and employment practices. The use of technology and individualized educational planning for students can be seen as significant educational innovations, and they are currently employed in public school systems.

In a study of 17 charter schools, Griffin and Wohlstetter (2001) found that few of these charter schools could articulate an integrated instructional program, and a consistent content-based professional development system. These schools benefited from the passionate, committed attitudes of the schools' leaders, but leadership was often conflicted by tensions between centralized and decentralized decision-making, and between school management and instructional leadership.

Charter schools accept increased accountability in exchange for decreased regulation and independence (Griffin and Wohlstetter, 2001). But, individual charter schools are operating in environments that provide a varied mix of autonomy, assistance, and accountability. The nature of this mix influences a charter school's ability to create and sustain itself. This study documented the variance in influences impacting charter school design and culture, which of course, lead to mixed outcomes. Though it is too early to analyze the academic outcomes of students over time in this case study, an evident mix of influences can be identified. The freedom of collaborative decision-making (regarding programs and systems design within the school) is celebrated by the participants in this study. They embrace and value democratic strategic planning, yet the stress of the structured state accountability system leaves limited ability to plan curriculum and assessment procedures outside state standards.

A number of major themes provide a review of what has brought the University Charter School to fruition. The political climate of the State was driven by a business conservative ideology supported by the Chairman. With these forces at play, it was a rational and logical decision for the Chairman and Chancellor to support a new University System policy which included the creation of the school. The creation of the

school was a bold political move to support the rational policy initiatives of research-based reading, K-16, and charter schools.

Within this case study, the paradigm of rational choice provides an explanation for the directive behavior of the Chairman to establish a charter school, and it prevailed even when the President of the University voiced a concern for the economic ramifications on the University. The *Every Child, Every Advantage* policy was not initially aligned with what was a rational economic reality of the University campus, but was ultimately forced in to action by the authoritative power of the System.

Authority and Power

In a review of the case study, it is evident that power and authority were instrumental in seeing the vision of the school to fruition. Power is the capacity to control or influence the behavior of others (Hanson, 2003). Robert Dahl suggests that power involves an ability to get another person to do something that he or she would not otherwise have done (Morgan, 1998). The Chairman exerted his influence within the University organization through his formal authority. Authority relationships are usual in formal bureaucratic organizations such as the University and certain specific mandates or orders from a given authority will be followed (Weber, 1946). As Chairman of the Board of Regents his position gave him the legitimate power to influence the University to move forward with the creation of the school, but he also had interpersonal alliances and networks which furthered his goals. This case study described how these alliances powerfully influenced policy changes in the state-wide use of research based reading, K-16 alignment, and support for charter schools.

Power depends on resources (Mann, 1992) and the most important is money because it can easily be converted to other resources (Dahl, 1986). The Chairman's leadership role on the Governor's Business Council put him in a position to align and direct monetary resources. The Chairman's alliance with the Governor was a powerful social resource which also empowered him in the political arena throughout the State. His call on the Governor to attend the first reading summit or to recruit the Energy Company President to head the "charter school bank" were examples of his use of this alliance with the highest level of authority in order to influence a political base of support.

The Chairman was a skilled organizational politician who systematically built and cultivated interpersonal alliances (Morgan, 1998) with the Governor, business community, and Chancellor. His positions of leadership as Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee of the Governor's Business Council and Chairman of the Board of Regents enhanced his power and authority. He was also regarded as a charismatic leader to conservative reformers. He was praised for being the "the driving force" in reform efforts by the Secretary of Education and known for wielding his power with laser-like determination to see initiatives through. As a business conservative he was skilled in his use of dominance, power and rational persuasion to assure support for his personal political rationale for setting policy agendas.

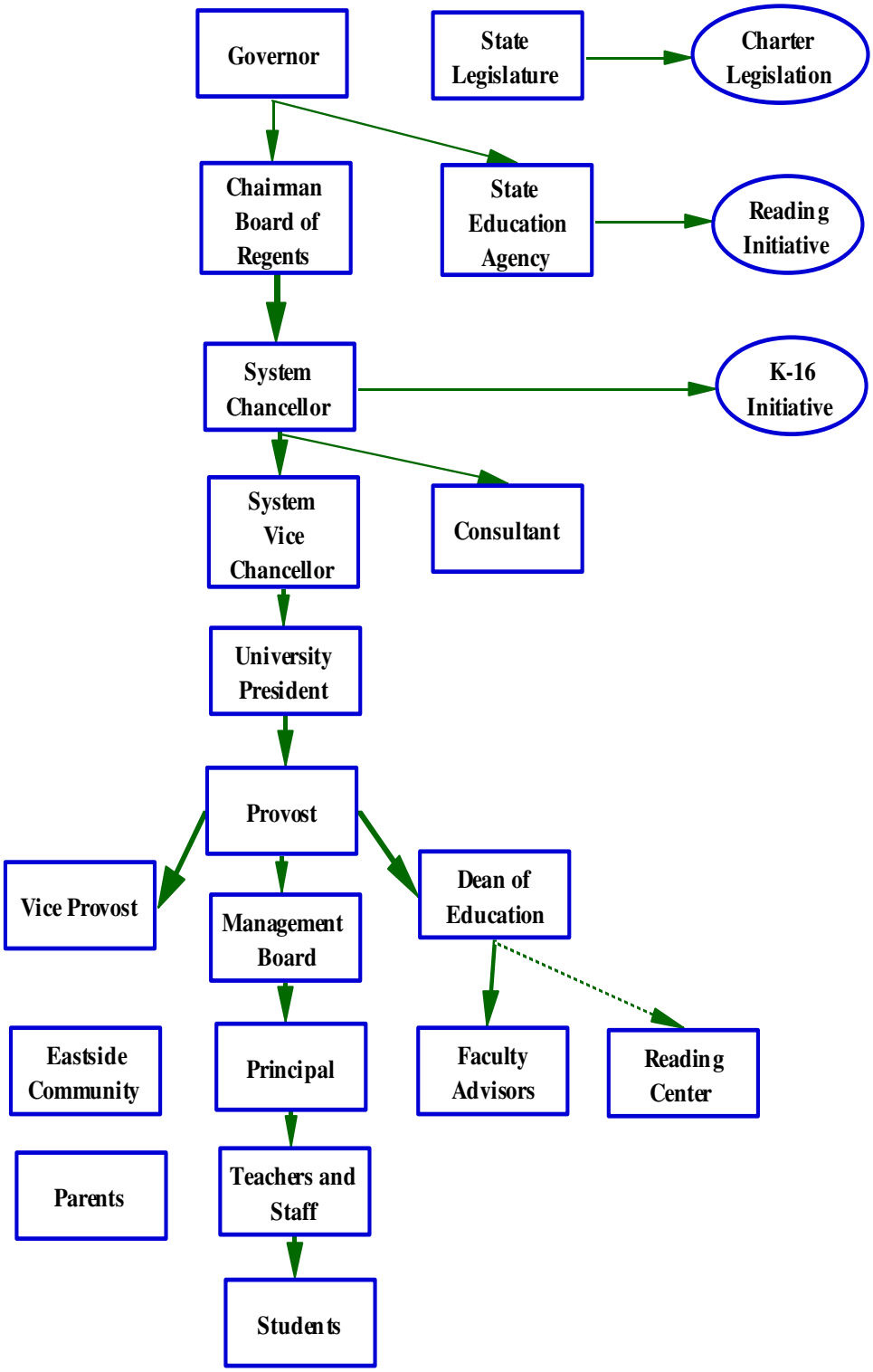
The power relationships in the story of the start-up of the University Elementary Charter School are hierarchical in nature. The decision to move forward with the charter school was a top-down decision with little collaboration or deliberation from the University campus. An important form of power in this top-down environment was the

expert power of the reading researchers and the paid consultant. The authority of knowledge is commonly needed to ensure high quality results.

The assurances of 'scientifically based research' gave the Director and reading consultant special knowledge or skill (French & Raven, 1959). The experience and expertise of the Assistant Commissioner at the State Education Agency gave credence to the need for a demonstration school for scientifically based reading research. This ideological alliance of experts provided best practice models in reading which were regarded as rationally efficient and effective, and consequently legislated and distributed throughout the state.

The consultant especially had expert power in her knowledge of school start-up and charter applications. She was hired for her understanding of the organizational complexities of schools, her knowledge of Texas Education Code and charter legislation, and her ability to assist in the search for the most expert principal to lead the school. They relied on the expert knowledge of the principal to create and run a school and conferred power for decision-making. When the University System delegated the school to the domain of the University campus, a new set of political actors came into play that tempered the political ideology of the school's earliest creators and sanctioned the democratic methods of the principal to build community as well as incorporate efficient systems. The principal's defined role marks a break in ideologies which ultimately changed the developmental dynamics of the school culture. The lines of authority, power, and influence in this case study are depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Lines of Power and Authority



Governance is government in action. In education it is a question of who controls schools which are organized to carry out the critical process of social reproduction. Education becomes the process in which a society with its own particular culture reproduces itself (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004). It is somewhat of a 'cultural furnace' where a particular image of the world is forged and way of living is passed on (Randall, 1977, p. 71). Much is at stake in deciding who will be educated, what will be taught, and who dominates and controls the process of educating children. The reality of school governance in the state and nation is based on a rational perspective of efficient systems, order, predictable instructional practices assured by scientific research, and a push for market competition through school choice. The University Elementary Charter School was created to further this macro-level perspective, yet at a micro-level its culture evolved to also embrace the human aspects of education. It is unique in its ability to balance orderly, efficient systems and embrace scientific best practices and at the same time express heartfelt respect, caring, and inclusion of individuals.

Selecting the Right Leader

The principal of the school in this case study was granted authority for decision-making and internal governance. Choosing a leader is one of the most critical parts in the development of a new organization and ultimately impacts the school culture. Choosing a leader is a political act; the political relationships established in the process are more important than the individual chosen (Sarason, 2002). New leaders are critical to the success or failure of a new organization. The principal had a proven record of success as

measured by the state accountability system. She was initially trained in developmental theory in early childhood, as well as strategic intervention strategies in special education. This balance of nurturance and rational planning aligned nicely with the intentions of the founders. She was also a product of leadership training in the mid-80's, and the reactionary reform efforts stemming from the publication of *A Nation at Risk*.

She embraced the principles of the Effective School Movement (Edmonds, 1979), and change models of the 1990's such as the Accelerated Schools Model (Levin, 1987). She was committed to continuous improvement and embraced the necessity of 21st Century Skills. She was transformational in her approach and possessed qualities of both distributed leadership and visionary leadership. Her ability to communicate the vision of the school and motivate and inspire others into action made her a charismatic leader.

Leaders create and manage culture by communicating what they believe and systematically paying attention to what they value. A mismatch of values within an organization creates an imbalance. How challenges are dealt with at the early stages of development is critical to the survival and equilibrium of the organization (Schein, 2004). The principal guided the new organization through 'survival problems' (Schein, 2004) in a manner that created a common understanding. Successful leaders must shift leadership styles after assessing individuals, context, and required tasks (Goleman, 2000).

Listening carefully to the founders' initial vision, the expectations of the University campus, and the external views of the school participants, she was able to adjust behavior, synthesize the values and shared beliefs of each group, and redefine the vision of the school to include the development of a caring community focused on the

individual child. The fusion of rational efficiency and productivity with heartfelt caring and democratic respect for the individual creates a unique characteristic of this school. What emerged as categories of culture, including shared basic assumptions, is discussed in the next section.

A Cultural - Social Perspective

The rational view may be predictive and provide explanations, but it does not capture the subjective meaning of events from participants. Opposing theories of school reform and change in public school policy go beyond rational thought and demand rethinking of educational change with both the heart and mind.

The debate about the cultural, social, and philosophical aims of education is kept alive by Andy Hargreaves (1997). In his article, *Rethinking Educational Change,* he was less concerned about restructuring schools than re-culturing them. He was not concerned with how teachers commit to the demands for changes from the dominant levels of governance over schools, but with how to make schools stimulating and supportive for teachers to make changes for themselves. Through this view, the culture of school participants such as teachers and parents are a prime focus for educational change.

Due to the recent twenty-year history of governmental imposed educational reforms on teachers which have undermined teacher morale, teachers are called to be more involved in the process of school reform (ed. by Hargreaves & Evans, 1997). Change can be cutting-edge, but also can cut deeply (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000). To break away from the issues of control inherent in mandated reform initiatives (McNeil,

1986); educators are reminded to be more collaborative in relationships between principals and teachers, among teachers, and with parents. It calls for collaboration with trust, candor, openness, risk-taking and commitment to continuous improvement.

This view supports educational reforms that are more closely linked to teachers' professional knowledge, professional culture, and their need for professional learning. Professional communities are expected to extend to a wider community beyond the school, and good teaching is not just a matter of being efficient, developing competence, mastering techniques, or possessing the "right" kind of knowledge. Good teaching involves emotions; it is infused with pleasure, passion, creativity, challenge, and joy (Hargreaves, 1995).

Noddings (1992) argues that current rational educational reform efforts elevate cognition above care as a priority for improvement. Within the market-driven view, schools are encouraged to compete against other schools. The more schools run on market principles of competition and choice, the connections that bind the field of education for all children becomes weaker (Wells, 2002). Balanced teachers and leaders are ones who are both cognitively and emotionally intelligent, able to draw deeply on both parts of their psyche (Deal and Peterson, 1994) and create a community of learners.

Caring/Respect/Inclusiveness

"The first major purpose of a school is to create and provide a culture hospitable to human learning, the second major purpose of school is to make it likely that students and educators will become and remain lifelong learners" (Barth, 2004). At the University

Elementary Charter School a spirit of caring, respect and inclusiveness demonstrated a sense of humanity and a commitment to the building of community and relationships to set the stage for learning. The individuals and families involved in the school were central to the normative elements and processes of the school community. Respect, development, and support of students, parents, and teachers all worked to empower and motivate the diverse community.

Education of the whole child (Noddings, 2005) encourages a focus on the child's academic achievement, personal growth, social skills, psychological development, and supports an advocacy for children in the hope of a future college education. Respect of individual knowledge and building from the strengths of the students and the teachers (Moll & Gonzalez, 2005) helped to create a professional learning community (Senge, 2000). The students were generally seen as active participants in their learning; embracing school with a sense of gratitude and a happiness to learn that is unusual in most schools. It was clear in observations that the children feel highly cared-for, loved, respected and safe (Noddings, 1992).

The expectations of an organizational culture are the norms applied to a specific situation (Brookover, 1982).The academic and social expectations are very high, yet the children show an eagerness to participate with their classmates and to share in their learning that is frequently absent in today's public school (Valenzuela, 1999). This ability to focus on academic achievement appeared to be in large part due to the school's culture of caring which flowed from the teachers' commitment to care for each other. As Valenzuela (1999) explains: "Caring theory addresses the need for pedagogy to follow

from and flow through relationships cultivated between teacher and student…. With its emphasis on respect, responsibility, and sociality, it provides a benchmark against which all humans are to be judged, formally educated or not" (p. 21).

Pride/Distinction

One of the key aspects of this school culture is the clear expression of pride and enthusiasm. The school spirit is new, fresh and exciting. The school itself is new and was developed as a demonstration site for the University. The school's sense of pride in being an evidence-based model (Hargreaves, 1999) has enhanced the community's desire to "make a difference," to create hope and change in their own, as well as other school communities. The students, teachers, parents, staff and community exhibit high energy and fervor for the possibility and promise of an excellent education. The school is 'one of a kind' in the State. It is unique in its connection to the University. This makes the school's participants feel special and distinct.

Beyond providing basic physiological needs and needs for safety and security, this school's sense of intimacy and community also provide for a sense of belonging and love (Maslow, 1970). Its distinction as the only university-sponsored charter school in the state also gives students, parents, and teachers a special feeling of esteem. The basic human desire to be highly regarded by others is obtained by participants. The school has a reputation for competence and status simply by being affiliated with the established reputation of the University. This is a motivating factor in the engagement of all participants and in satisfying the lower level human need for belonging, there is an assumption that self-actualization (Maslow, 1970) will emerge for teachers in their

teaching, students in their achievement, and parents in their important duty as caretakers. The vision that all participants will reach their full potential in self development and self expression is inherent in the 'grand mission' of the school.

A Community of Learners

What the school lacks in reflecting a local, geographic neighborly community, they make up for by being 'Little Lions' preparing to become like the 'Lions' at the university they represent. It is a community of learners which stretches from the classroom to the University. The bumper sticker found on parents' cars, 'From PK to Ph.D.' is not an idle dream. The principal often expresses her joy in participating in a true 'community of learners' and the value of the continual expression of inquiry.

Staff development flows naturally since most of the teachers are enrolled in or have recently completed graduate studies at the University. "It is not always about the answers, but often the questions that drive the school" (Principal, personal communication, Oct. 20, 2004). With the power of expert knowledge at hand, the tremendous involvement of the sponsoring university impacts the school's culture.

The 'Lions' are represented at the school in the form of the University departmental mentoring for the teachers, student teacher involvement from the College of Education; internships in the fields of nursing by the School of Nursing; social workers by the School of Social Work; speech therapist by the College of Communications; and school psychologist by the department of Education Psychology, to name but a few. Although there is distinctiveness due to the extended community and quest for personal

development, the schools' small size and united sense of purpose (Clark, 1970) makes it very distinct.

A Democratic Mission

The mission of the school becomes even grander in its democratic duty to demonstrate best practice for the betterment of all public schools. Its keen sense of mission is driven by the passion of its leader. There is a value among participants for embracing the spirit of every child, and also to fine tune the efficient research based practices to assure replicable models of obtaining academic success. Contributing this balance to other school educators is valued as a way to 'make a difference' and 'impact public education'. The principal refers to addressing effectively both the cognitive and emotional aspects of schooling as the "holy grail of education". "Public schools are all trying to figure out how to balance the business of addressing state requirements and expectations while also caring for the human needs of their school communities " (Principal, personal communication, Oct. 20, 2004).

This school community spirit in this case study is reflected in a friendly, open, home-like environment (Noddings, 2005) that supports a commitment to excellence in education. While academic achievement is central and primary in this school, it is supported by character education (Nickell and Field, 1999) and social skills that honor the contribution of the students' families (Moll, 2005) and the value of the school staff, faculty and administration.

Respectful dialogue (Isaacs, 1999), sharing of ideas and concerns (Senge, et. al., 2004) and responsiveness to students, parents and staff, all support: 1) the students' and faculty's sense of worth, 2) the teachers' collaborative work culture (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996) and 3) the critical importance of parental engagement (Epstein, 1988; Comer,1993; Young; 1999; López, 2003).

Yankelovich (1999) asserts that "dialogue brings forth the wisdom inherent in the collective public experience" (p. 200). Dialogue enables healthy self-esteem, collaborative spirit and the all-important parental involvement. This is reminiscent of Ladson-Billings' (1994) approach: As the students and their parents share their practices with the other students and teachers, "students real life experiences are legitimized as they become part of the 'official' curriculum" (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This dialogue – among and between the various stakeholders of a school community—is indeed the foundation of a caring relationship, as demonstrated by Noddings model of exchange (1988).

Democratic Strategic Planning

The University Elementary School's spirit is also a spirit of commitment and dedication (Noguera, 2003). Parents have selected the school for their children (Viteritti, 1999). Teachers have been selected for their commitment to children, and their expertise in the craft of teaching (McEwan, 2002). There is a diagnostic-prescriptive approach to addressing the needs of all students, yet in embracing this approach, teachers collaborate in strategic planning to assure success for individual students.

Strategic planning at the school is democratic in nature. There are forums organized for bringing forth issues for discussion and deliberation and to support continuous change. Teachers meet individually with the principal to set individual goals, review data on student progress and discuss interventions. They also meet with colleagues in grade-level teams, and at student staffing meetings. Student staffing meetings are helpful in bringing together the expert base of the school to prescribe needed interventions. This team approach to planning includes administrators, special education teachers, the reading specialist, the speech and language professor, the nurse, social worker, school psychologist, and most importantly the parent. Each member contributes to the investigation of students' strengths and weaknesses and collaborates towards the best course of action for school success.

Other forums for democratic strategic planning include Parent Forum Meetings, Education Council Meetings, Management Board Meetings, faculty meetings, grade-level meetings, team leader meetings, and principal's coffees. The school's yearly strategic plan or education plan is developed through a series of public forums in which the membership of the school is allowed to dialogue about needed improvements. The strategic planning process provides opportunity for teachers, parents, and faculty advisors to participate in creating a shared, democratic future for the school (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2002).

The leadership role of the principal in this process is to articulate the shared vision, harmonize diverse perspectives, communicate commitment, and keep the process moving. As opposed to a bureaucratic hierarchical approach, it is more comprehensive

because decisions are based on more diverse sources of information, making planning more informed and implementation more committed.

In this case study, teachers were grateful for the principal's commitment to respect the recommendations of the group and follow-through with implementation plans, yet at the same time she would recognize the authoritative power of her position. The true intent of Ray Budde's (1971) view of charter schools appears to be realized in this use of democratic planning processes at the school. At every step in the planning process there is full inclusion and the principal assumes the role of facilitator. Democratic strategic planning is important for self-management within the organization, because everyone is responsible for the results the organization produces. The respect for individual contribution is a motivating factor in the engagement of all stakeholders at the school. Meetings are an opportunity to build better relationships, commit to shared values, create alignment, inspire leadership, improve participation, and resolve conflict (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2002).

The Role of Parents

Parents are respected as key contributors to the school culture. The school attempts to be more responsive by listening carefully to parents without stereotyping their concerns. Parents have many prospects for engagement in the school community (Epstein, 1988; Comer, 1993). The school community is referred to as an extended family, and parents are welcomed into the caring culture of the school. Parents are represented on all significant committees and boards, including the Education Council, the Management Board and, of course, the Parent Forum.

Communications with parents are multiple and daily (Epstein, 1988) and are offered in both English and Spanish. The Principal's Coffee, Parent Forum meetings, parent letters, parent contracts, parent handbook, and the school website all serve to encourage the parents to voice their concerns, ask questions of teachers and administration, or just observe or participate as volunteers in the classroom. They are supported in developing the social and academic competence to support their child within the dominant culture's structure of schooling. The school takes on the social service role of supporting children and families and building resiliency by encouraging pro-social bonding, providing care and support, communicating high expectations, and providing meaningful opportunities for participation and contribution (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

Parents are respected for having individual knowledge and expertise that is frequently shared with other parents and faculty (González, 2005) in the pursuit of the omni-present goal of educating the children and helping provide for each one the future they all deserve. Their input is critical to the success of the school (Epstein, 1988). Yankelovich suggests that "engaging the public in dialogue … [adds] the value-rich perspectives of the public to the information-rich perspectives of the expert" (1999, pp.191-192). Yankelovich goes on to explain that the public is often excluded from policy formation because of a "narrow, hierarchical conception of knowledge that excludes the wisdom of the collectivity – arguable the most indispensable virtue of sound policy" (1999, p. 198).

It is critical that all the stakeholders feel free to speak. One of the most inspiring activities which included parents was the design of the permanent school building. In analyzing the results of the parent survey, it became evident that parents and community members wanted the school to 'feel like a second home,' be a 'source of inspiration,' and to be a special place which would 'bring the kids and the community together.' The building image was to be one of 'academic achievement' and 'community and parental involvement.'

Leadership

The principal is well respected and possesses both legitimate and competent authority. She has personal qualities which make her a charismatic leader. These qualities were much appreciated by University leaders in their efforts to start up the school. Her ability to engage participants at every level of the organization, from the University System and University campus administration, to faculty advisors, teachers, parents, and students was an instrumental asset. She was effective in articulating the school's mission and procuring social and material resources to support it. She possessed an ability to diplomatically embrace the rational conservative agenda for efficient practices from the school's founders, and meld it with the cultural and emotional needs of the school's clients and a democratic approach to schooling.

As a school manger she was rational, logical, and organized; facilitating the creation of orderly systems and governance structures. She had a rational acceptance of the state's accountability system and not only viewed its compliance as a reality of public schooling, but could articulate its value in providing equity in the education of all

children as they prepared for citizenship and the American workforce. The art of teaching resiliency to the expectations of our national educational culture with its accountability measures of success were all embedded in the work of the principal.

Another important aim of the school leader was to articulate the importance of social and emotional education within a caring environment to assure self actualization and the development of her clients to their fullest potential. The school's administrative leadership represents a dedication to both excellence and inclusion of all school community members. This translated into behavior that is at times highly self-sacrificing, always hard-working, and rarely remunerated on behalf of the faculty and parents. While the atmosphere can be intense, and time is always limited, the school community has its eye on the prize: bright, happy and successful 'Little Lions' who were learning and achieving at the end of each day and each year.

The Power of Story

Stories play a large part in creating this vibrant, school spirit (Glickman, 2003). A school leader's ability to use symbolic language through storytelling gives emotional power to the school vision (Conger, 1991). Many of the stories told in this case study were about the university, its colors, its athletes, and visits by faculty and university students. When the University won a national football championship, the story of the game's hero was repeated as a symbol of the power of disciplined practice, perseverance, and teamwork with the hope of transference to student study skills.

The faculty liked to talk about shared professional development (Louis & Marks, 1998) activities, trips and retreats—the times when they are alone as a group and able to focus on one another and themselves. The experience of having fun while getting to know each other personally and professionally during a character education staff development opportunity in a large urban city, created stories which, when told, reinforced the value of fun, dialogue and respect for each other.

The power of telling these types of stories is that they establish the shared basic assumptions and beliefs of the group to be able to be passed on to new members. There are many stories at the school of the children's struggling home life which reinforce the value of caring and inclusion. There are stories of why and how the school was started (Glickman, 2003) and how it was created to support what had been a neglected part of the University's city. These reinforce the value of social equity and the importance of the contributions of the community as a whole in effecting change. They also reinforce the University's sense of social responsibility, and through this recognition strengthen their commitment to the school. Through the use of the media and stories on television news, the school has become important in fostering the hope that many families seek in their schools today.

Story telling is central, actively supported and encouraged. It is a generative force that helps carry the school community to the next day, to the next success (Senge, et. al., 2004**).** The school's families are excited at the prospect of having their children attend this school. Its close connection with the university is promoted by the principal and staff knowing that it adds to the enthusiasm and hope for their children's futures. Here is one

story that helps characterize this hope at the University Elementary told by the President of the University.

> I remember coming out to the school – before the school was open – and I met a grandparent whose child was going to be in this school. They were helping out on something, but what I noticed was the glow in the parent and the enthusiasm he had for being attached to the school. And their way of looking at the school as an extension of the university and the university as the peerless beacon of hope! It really struck me and I will not forget that interaction. I can't remember the details but this parent was so proud that his grandson was going to be in this school – and we hadn't even opened yet! I thought, we have to be doing the right thing here. (President, personal communication, March 17, 2006).

Communicating Cultural Values

Besides storytelling, there are many channels of communication available to students, parents, teachers, and university faculty. There are dozens of regular activities that support and reinforce the culture and community's development on a daily basis, and opportunities for collaboration among students, faculty and parents (Mitchell, 1996). One of the most cited activities in the course of this research is the morning assembly where the entire student body meets with the teachers and administration, along with many parents, to start the day on a positive note (Glickman, 2003). The established ritual of singing the school song, saying the American pledge in English and Spanish, reciting their 'Little Lion' pledge, and sharing stories of new siblings, birthdays and family events was noted throughout this research as significant in contributing to the school culture.

One example is when a new baby is born to a 'Little Lion' family, the baby is presented with a baby longhorn bib and a book donated by the University Co-op. He or she is welcomed to and honored by the school community (Glickman, 2003) as a "Baby

Bevo" and future member of the school community. The family is always reminded of the importance of reading. This celebration for new life in the community demonstrates the school's respect for the family and reinforces the value of family, community, responsibility, as well as early literacy.

The morning assembly is also a time to set expectations, celebrate successes, and help the community organize for upcoming events. Expectations for social behavior are reinforced and recognition is made for sterling performance by groups or individuals. Children are thanked and recognized for parental leadership, as well as their own. Expectations for performance within the community are articulated and reinforced. Children are often reminded of their role as a student and the necessity of active participation in their learning through completion of homework, practicing good listening, and coming to school ready to do their best. Morning assembly provides an opportunity to announce upcoming study trips, planned visits by community and university leaders, and a review of the school calendar of events. It establishes a sense of order, expectation, and routine, but also a comforting atmosphere of caring, respect, and community….all values inherent in the school culture.

Balancing Humanistic Values and Efficient Systems

In its development, this school encountered internal issues relating to staffing governance, curriculum/instructional methods, university faculty engagement, safety and security, student achievement, finances, and facilities; to name a few. Externally pressures came from the State Education Agency, community expectations, lottery procedures, and the System's expectation for immediate success. This study is not

intended to analyze the various problems solved at the school over the first three years of its operation, but how problems were solved is an important contribution. The democratic means of problem solving and the principal's ability to adapt to this internal cultural value was necessary for the school's survival in the first years (Darling-Hammond, 1997)

John Dewey is known for his definition of democracy as a state of being, rather than a form of government. He refers to the cultural, rather than constitutional, aspect of democracy when he calls it "primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 1966). This indicates the need for the human connections necessary for a democratic society and the requirement of the "emotional current of love" (Burch, 2000). The positive development of a society is closely correlated with opportunities for the growth of individuals, and the development of individuals contributes to a flourishing democracy. The individual good can not be separated from the common good (Kesson, 2004).

The school was conceived with the intention of creating a rational, predictable model of success worthy of replication. It is distinct in its connection to a world class University, but understands that the fortune of one school should not perversely be linked to the failure of others. Sustainable education leadership is about being responsible to and for all the schools and students. Sustainability is ultimately and unavoidably about social justice (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). The school leadership at this school is challenged with not just caring about the private good of one group of children and families, but to commit to the public good, stretching beyond individual schools and distributing leadership and its effects across many different schools.

Successful schools are called to coach struggling schools to help them improve, and socially-just leaders promote practical and positive strategies to restore neighboring public schools. We are all connected in chains of care, not only to friends and family around us, but also to other people whom we cannot see (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Every member of a community, whether it is the community within a school, a classroom, or an entire school district, holds some responsibility for the welfare of every other person and for the welfare of the community as a whole (Barth, 2004). At this demonstration site of effective research-based best practice, the entire community is behind the paramount and overriding goal of providing the very best education for the children by caring for their hearts and minds. And, very importantly, there is a commitment to demonstrating the value of this for the good of all children.

Chapter 9

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research and Charter School Practice

The findings of this study have implications which lead to recommendations for practice and future study. Implications and recommendations have been formulated based on the findings that emerged in this descriptive research that were significant in terms of consensus agreement. The methodology for this research was unique in documenting factors in decision-making, and in recording consensus among participants on various issues in different stages of development and implementation. The school model that resulted from this descriptive process identifies seven essential components of an effective and efficient charter school: 1) Strong Leadership, 2) Balanced Efficiency and Humanity, 3) Democratic Dialogue, 4) Strategic Planning, 5) Caring and Respect, 6) the Power of Feeling Special or Distinct, and 7) Embracing the Child Centered Spirit of Students.

Role of Leadership

Regardless of the purpose or focus of a school, the development of any new organization provides novel challenges and opportunities (Brouillette, 2002, Sarason, 2002). It is important for the initial leader of a new organization to recognize the way things are and the way things should be, adapt the vision accordingly, and navigate the organization out of any troubled waters to assure its sustainability. Leadership defines culture and culture defines leadership. Edgar Schein (2004) saw this as two sides of the

same coin. Once a culture exists it will determine the criteria for leadership and ultimately determine who will be the leader. If the culture within an organization becomes dysfunctional, it is the role of the leader to perceive functional and dysfunctional elements of the existing culture and manage cultural evolution and change to assure that the group will survive in a changing environment (Schein, 2004). It is important to define the mission of an organization early within the group's development as members, share and define their distinctive purposes, and develop ways to solve the problems of survival.

An important aspect of leadership is listening and being in tune with the realities and concerns of all participants. Within a school, a principal must listen and negotiate the needs of various parties, which include students, parents, teachers, and governing agencies. Even internal consensus on the core mission does not guarantee that the group will perceive common goals. To adapt and survive external environmental factors, an organization must be able to adapt and maintain internal relationships among members (Schein, 2004). Therefore, internal and external adaptations are both important; individuals within a group must come together to develop systems of communication and behavior that permit them to interpret conditions in similar ways.

Group ideology is formed by the way critical events are managed, and through the group's survival of a problem comes common group understanding of reality, truth, time and space. These understandings become integral to the culture as group values, expressed by the leadership, are passed on to new members. Shared planning and

problem-solving forge a strong team, and groups form common bonds in being part of the team. Group identity takes shape in the rewards of working together.

Leaders create and manage culture by communicating what they believe and systematically paying attention to what they value. It is important skill in school leadership to be able to balance the equilibrium of the organization and successfully articulate and demonstrate the core values of the school culture. Leaders should also be aware of the need to develop organizations that are able to make continual diagnosis and interventions when the group is challenged beyond its ability to change (Schein, 2004). There are times when leadership is responsible for helping a group unlearn fixed cultural assumptions for the sake of continual improvement.

Leaders of new organizations have the dual responsibility of answering to the traditional structure while creating a new setting. They deal with isolation resulting from being set apart from those of equal status in other settings and the guidance of experienced superiors (Brouillette, 2002, Sarason, 2002). Therefore it is important for leaders trained to be compliant mid-managers to participate democratically in the professional group to seek guidance and direction. Core leadership groups should be established from the community to set ground rules for problem-solving within the organization. Forums should be established within the organization to problem-solve internal issues and assure compliance with external oversight pressures.

Balancing Efficiency and Humanity

The results of this research indicate a balance of efficient systems and high expectations for performance within the cultural and human aspects of schooling. In

pondering the nature of balance found in these results, it is useful to consider the concepts of *yin* and *yang* which have been symbols in Eastern cultures since early civilization. They are conceived as being the two great opposite but complementary forces at work in the cosmos. *Yin* is the supreme feminine power, and *yang*, its masculine counterpart. Their cosmic influence is described as the human equilibrium. This duality of the opposite but complimentary forces present at the University Elementary School can be used to illustrate the balancing of efficiency and humanity in their model.

The replication of efficient systems and proven best practices which held the promise of predictable outcomes were both rational goals supporting the mission of this school reform. Yet, new definitions arose from the collective membership regarding needs for a culture of respect, caring and dialogue as significant aspects of the school culture.

The principal demonstrates a balance of efficiency and nurturance within the school. School leaders must assure that all the component elements of the organization fit together to create a finely tuned functioning machine (Nadler & Tushman, 1980). The congruence of all aspects of the school organization is essential, but should never be stagnant. Change and adaptation is predictable in our fast-paced world. Efficient systems are necessary to keep the school machine fine-tuned to assure congruence and stability. Businesses have looked to the social psychology literature and organizational theory to find the best methods to organize, but the questions remains concerning how you arrange for humans within the organization to be more productive. Student academic achievement is the reason that efficient systems exist in public schools, but social, emotional, and

spiritual development must be supported as well to cultivate a readiness to learn that is critical to success.

The principal at the school has many responsibilities, including: responsibilities for the transportation of students, food service at breakfast and lunch, reporting to the management board, reporting to the State Education Agency, managing the budget, ensuring compliance with state and federal laws, as well as interacting with teachers, staff, and students on a daily basis, and reporting to parents and the community.

There is a business aspect to the work of a school. Teachers are required to plan lessons, assess students, report results, plan for individual needs, communicate with parents through report cards, conferences, and e-mail, and prepare students for state-wide assessments. The school structure is a blueprint for the pattern of expectations and exchanges among internal players (teachers, staff, and students) and external constituencies (parents, community, and the university). Structures within schools can enhance and constrain what an organization can accomplish (Boleman & Deal, 1997).

Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives and are designed as a rational structure of jobs and activities (Morgan, 1998). As with most organizations, the University Elementary Charter School has clearly defined parts, roles, and expectations to increase performance, productivity, and efficiency. One example is the use of PALM pilots for ongoing student assessment as an efficient means to record data. This data is analyzed and using a tiered model of strategic interventions wherein students are put into clustered groups for instruction in the classroom or with the reading specialist, speech and language specialist, school psychologist, or content master teacher.

The importance of streamlining systems for efficient practice is to reduce the workload and increase productivity. Schools today are burdened with increased paperwork, excessive e-mail, increased reporting to parents and community, and requirements of the state and local accountability systems. Establishing efficient systems to manage the demands of schooling provides a sense of security in the organization that business is being taken care of. The evidence of efficient systems at the school included calendars, schedules, bulletins, minutes, newsletters, established meeting dates and times, report cards, achievement data reports, student service plans, etc. These are all means to keep the school machine running smoothly and to communicate expectations. See Figure 3 to see a graphic representation of the cultural equilibrium found in this study.

The "Whole Child" is at the center of a configuration of elements representing aspects of Efficiency and Humanity. These elements/aspects can be operationalzed at every level and area of the organization. Both planning and implementation must understand the importance of integrating these elements in all functions and practices of the organization. The organizational culture that evolves is balanced in terms of its effectiveness and efficiency, and participants share common values and perspectives of the purpose of all school activities.

Democratic Dialogue

Democratic dialogue at the school in this study was an important technique used for problem solving and communication of values and beliefs. The result of these sessions was not only to promote a strong cultural value of respect for the individual, but also to respect democratic contributions to the well-being of the whole. Individuals felt

that the school was collaborative and that communication systems were in place. Strong collaborative cultures or professional communities in teaching are powerfully linked to

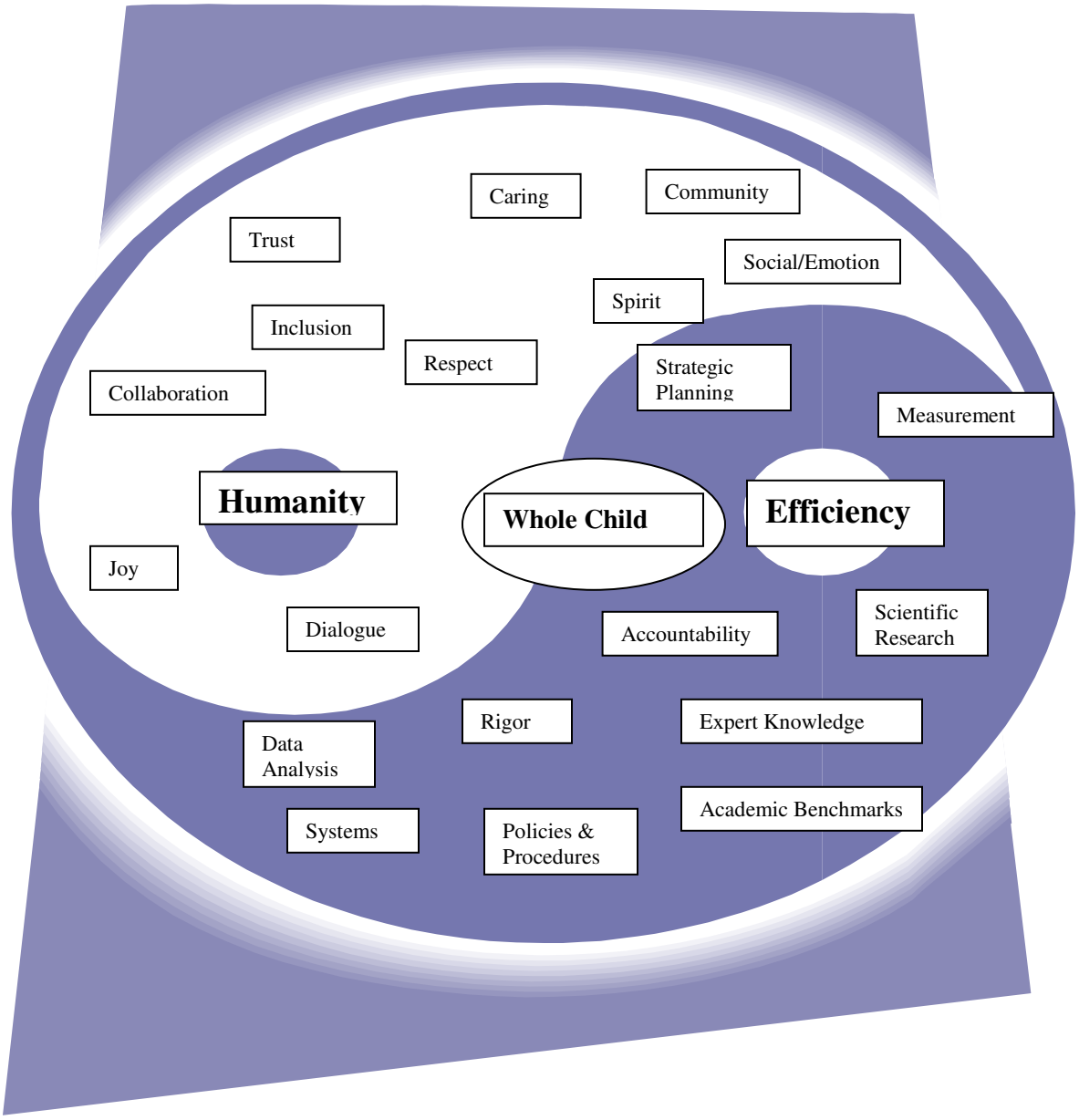


Figure 3: School Cultural Equilibrium

effective classroom learning, stronger professional confidence, and feelings of self-efficacy among teachers, and contributes to the ability of teachers to initiate and respond to change (Hargreaves, et. al., 2001).

The most effective practice for team-learning emerges from dialogue. It is the sustained collective inquiry into everyday experience. The goal is to establish a "container" for inquiry or a setting where people can become more aware of the context around their experiences. During the dialogue process people learn how to think together. This is not just in the sense of analyzing a shared problem or creating new shared knowledge, but in the sense of occupying a collective sensibility, in which the thoughts, emotions, and resulting actions belong not to one individual but to everyone together (Isaacs, 1999).

Due to the range of institutional barriers found in most schools, dialogue has almost become a lost practice. Its importance is in creating conditions in which people can experience the emergence of the dominate values of the whole. It encourages people to suspend their assumptions and be open to listening in an effort to explore personal assumptions from a different view (Senge et. al, 2000). Facilitated dialogue is the systematic orchestration of meaning and learning between people (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2002). It is the role of the leader to assure time and space to invite the membership of the school into this participatory consciousness. Dialogue allows for the flow of organizational productivity and morale, and increases communication and collaborative relationships.

Forums or venues for problem-solving were established at the University Charter School, and each of these had ground rules for behavior. These were open meetings in which people affected by a problem were invited to gather and encouraged to listen to all sides of the issue before openly exploring ideas and solutions. Contributions were respected and valued, and consensus was built. Facilitating dialogue is an art in making participants feel safe enough to take risks, to communicate honestly, as well as to listen empathetically, even when you don't agree. Dialogue, or collaborative conversation, is the soul of self-managing teams and democratic organizations in which values emerge and problems are solved as culture is developed (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2002).

Strategic Planning

The University Charter School put a high level of efficient systems into place to assure the continual improvement of the organization as well as support student academic success. Strategic planning was one aspect of this case study that demonstrated the value of rational, logical planning, measurement, and democratic dialogue. Democratic strategic planning allowed for leadership and self-management. The teachers were trained to analyzing data, discuss data within a team, and collaboratively set individual learning goals for students. Planning and monitoring of plans was ongoing and fluid. Inquiry and further analysis were integral to keeping all aspects of the school moving forward. The rigor of this inquiry drove most participants towards achieving perfection, but this was balanced by participants feeling secure in the knowledge that all issues were open for deliberation and planning.

The Education Council was the best example of a collaborative team. They were made up of teachers, parents, administration, and university faculty and met each month for the consensus-based, inclusive process of problem-solving. These meetings were intelligent, interesting and useful in that members were invested and took responsibility for making them work. Engaging in the dialogue was as important as finding answers to important questions and issues. Members indicated a sense of camaraderie and self-fulfillment, and there was a pervasive climate of respect which became a core value of the school membership and became embedded in the school culture.

Caring and Respect

The main aim of education should be a moral one, that of nurturing the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable persons (Noddings, 1992). All children should learn to care for themselves, others, animals, plants, as well as the earth. As humans, we need to be cared for by being understood, received, respected, and recognized, and, in turn, learn to be caring. Caring does not come in a single package, but rather requires different behaviors for different situations with different people. Good teaching requires the development of relationships over time. Modeling caring behavior and directly teaching caring for one another puts the human dimension back into education. Students will do things for people they like and trust. One expression used at the school in this study was, “They want to know that you care before they care to know what you know”. When participants were asked what people cared about at the school, they consistently mentioned caring for the children, as well as caring for each other. One teacher

articulated the value of adults caring for each other and passing this value of caring on to the students.

Teaching caring was done both formally and informally at the charter school. Teachers took time out of each day to build community, trust, and respect within their classrooms. A reliable resource for developing social skills was available to enhance social and emotional development. Supporting the whole child is an espoused value of the school community, and caring and relating to others is a mental model that was clearly articulated. As a community children are reminded that they are loved by the principal at morning assembly and frequently given hugs. One parent commented on observing hugs between parents, between teachers, and between the principal and members of the school community. Due to the intimacy afforded by the size of the school each student is recognized by name and often reminded of individual expectations.

Learning to care and be cared-for is a major developmental task and many children in urban areas do not learn how to care, but also do not know what it means to be cared-for (Noddings, 2002). It seems obvious that caring for children and modeling caring with others will lead to a more caring society. Self-esteem is developed when people feel loved and cared-for and this is the basis for children to reach their highest potential and become self-actualized (Maslow, 1970). Public schools should be more involved in helping children learn to care and be cared-for. Time and curriculum should be established to allow for social skills instruction, but also the natural modeling of human kindness and caring.

The Power of Feeling Special or Distinct

People occupy defined roles in schools. There is the role of the student, the parent, the teacher, the principal, but they each come with unique human needs. All individuals working within organizations are concerned about fulfilling their needs in the course of doing their jobs. When needs are not met there is disequilibrium. All people need attention to fundamental biological needs, to safety and security needs, as well as a need for belonging, love, and social inclusion. Maslow (1970) saw these needs on a hierarchy. The need for satisfactory associations, friendship and affection was the third level on his needs hierarchy. Schools have embraced their responsibility in addressing basic needs such as food and clothing, and in recent years have been required to assure safety and security. Required public school breakfast and lunch programs, and mandated school crisis plans are an example of these efforts.

The introduction of character education and social skills programs is an attempt to coach students to be successful in social groups and address the need for belonging, but it is not yet standard practice for the institutions of school to be responsible for extending love, caring and affection to children. The value of this important aspect of human socialization varies and is dependent on the culture of the school and its community. But, it is an important step in moving children to building a sense of self-respect, competence, and confidence.

A high level of recognition, appreciation and status provides dignity and self-esteem. Self-esteem then leads to the highest level of self-fulfillment and self-actualization in which an individual is capable of the highest levels of achievement and

maximum self development (Maslow, 1970). Maslow (1970) advocates that organizations such as schools should provide the highest level of need satisfaction, because self-actualized students, teachers, and administrators are the best performers. Sergiovanni (1966) reported that the largest deficiencies for professional educators were satisfying self-esteem and self-actualization.

The school in this case study held caring and respect as a common value. Through the distinction of being affiliated to the university, students, parents, and teachers, demonstrated a high level of self-esteem. This sense of pride and accomplishment provided a confidence in parents and students to begin discussing "going all the way" to the realization of their fullest potential; a college education (the initial vision of the K-16 pipeline). The power of Maslow's theory was demonstrated through this case study and is important in the development of future schools. All schools can build off the strengths of its membership and create images and symbols that will bring pride and recognition to its members. It is the role of the leadership of the school to build this aspect of the school and market it through communication systems.

Embracing the Child Centered Spirit of Students

The mention of spirituality in schools has become heavily politicized and divisive in fierce debates over "separation of church and state" and appropriateness of "prayer in schools". The integration of the spiritual development in children goes beyond Maslow's hierarchy into development of the spiritual soul. The heart of learning is revealed within each one of us rooted in our spirit and zest for life. By being still to external forces, and

by moving inside to the core of our experience, the full expression of the spirit can be revealed.

Spirituality in education is about intimacy with our perceptions, our thoughts, and our emotions. It is about experience with your body, mind, and heart. Spirituality identity arises in the wonder of each individual's search for meaning, not from forced indoctrination. It rises out of our unique mix of awareness, experience, and expression (Glazer, 1999). A child's education can serve as the core of a lifelong journey towards wholeness, rather than just an accumulation of facts and skills. True learning requires openness to the unknown. Spirituality addresses wholeness and is viewed as an important and necessary goal of education. Learning to be aware of the power of your spirit involves a process of transformational growth that requires conceptual and physical mastery and dynamic interpersonal work (Glazer, 1999).

The intent of public schooling is to serve our capitalistic society and nationalism, not the spiritual development of the child (Miller, 1999). Children are taught to compete to reach the top of a social hierarchy and schools are organized with rational procedures for grading, curriculum standardization, grade level progression, bell systems, and a hierarchy of authority. Children are seen as social and intellectual capital sponsored by the public school system on their path to the work force. The 'new science' (Wheatley, 1999) and supporters of holistic education believe that human beings are complex existential entities made up of many layers of meaning. We are biological, ecological, psychological, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual. We can not explain our make up

through a single lens, and therefore must be aware that many lenses can be used in learning.

When the school in this case study declared their tag line to be "Teaching to the Spirit of Every Child", they were not only embracing the individual nature of each child as intellectual beings, but also the social, emotional, physical, and spiritual complexities of each child. The teacher interviews consistently referenced teaching to the whole child. This was in recognition of the fullness of each child, including their soul. This recognition only adds to the equilibrium found within the school's practice. Teaching to the spiritual nature of children is not considered rational. It is not something that can be measured or predicted, documented or organized. "New science" (Wheatley, 1999) tells us:

- A child is light. They represent the innocence of humanity.
- Our intuition of love and attachment is the core truth of our lives.
- We can and must understand our children – minds, bodies, and spirit- much better than we do.
- Our children need our constant nurturing presence, as well as the nurturing presence of a community.
- Everything we do has a spiritual consequence. (Gurian, 2002)

If schools are to be the institutions responsible for the education of our society, it is necessary in the evolution of our humanity that this body of "new science," including metaphysics, be explored by further research as it relates to the education of children.

Recommendations:

Recommendations for practice in public charter schools based on this research include:

- Schools should respect and draw from the expertise of its participants, including the life experience of its children. By building solidarity and focusing on the

strengths of its membership, the school will come to know the power of the collective group and realize its vision.

- A school is a community, not a group of interested stakeholders, and by creating a constant climate of inquiry you enhance the community of learners. Teaching and learning involves the whole school, but it is important to embrace the professional community that uses knowledge, experience, and research to inform practice.

- Children should be respected as active partners in their education, and parents and teachers respected as active participants in the development and governance of the school.

- Forums for democratic dialogue should be created. They build trust, respect, and community and allow for problem-solving based on the values of the collective community.

- Public schools were established with a rational objective to provide an equitable education and assure equitable opportunity for all children. Schools are responsible for student learning, but must also recognize that children are not material products and have hearts, minds and souls worthy of individual attention and development within schools.

- The mission of the school should focus on teaching and learning and the positive belief in the potential of all participants. The mission should motivate both the hearts and minds of staff, students, and community.

- School leaders should identify, support, and articulate the core values of the group by incorporating them in all decisions, and build off of the existing traditions and values in the constant adaptations needed for continual improvement.

- School leaders should recruit, hire, and assist in socializing new members who share the values of the culture and will add to or enhance those values.

- School leaders should create and use stories, rituals, and ceremony to reinforce core cultural values, recognize successes, and support a rich sense of history and purpose.

- Schools should physically demonstrate pride and joyous engagement as well as a spirit of respect and caring. School membership should have an added sense of self-esteem for participation.

Closing Remarks and Reflections

This school demonstrated the development of an innovative, responsive climate to address the diverse demographics and complex needs of students. It was important that the leadership of the school be aligned with the needs of the school community in order for it to succeed in a natural way. School leadership is the agent that gives authority to the schools to develop its structure, and it shapes the culture of that the school that consequentially emerges. It is through the problems solved by the stakeholders of the school and the shared basic assumptions that surround those solutions that a school culture is created and passed on to new members. It is through these culturally relevant rules and enlightened ways of being that schools can function as positive, learning environments.

Schools are complex, adaptive systems (Ginsberg, 1996) that can move past "path-dependent processes" (Powell, 1991) by forging new solutions. By staying in close contact with the parents and by listening to the students and teachers, the University Elementary Charter School has been able to create a new, adaptive place that students, teachers, administrators, and the school community, can hold sacred (Glickman, 2003). The autonomy granted by the charter status of the elementary school has been a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the schools' success. In addition to relative autonomy, the school has empowered teachers and parents by providing forums to build communication, trust and respect through democratic dialogue.

This school acknowledges that the parents, public, and socio-cultural communities or environments they inhabit, are part of the school. As with the high-

performing Hispanic schools (Reyes, et al, 1999), this school has adapted itself for students, empowered teachers, shared the governance, and created challenging curricula. Most importantly, it has built relationships with students and their families, and has essentially put students first. This is accomplished more effectively when the participants at the school site level are empowered to design programs and services based on student and family needs. The balance between schools as efficient organizations and the humanistic nature of their environments is critical to the development of a successful school.

How school leaders continue to adapt and change to the demands of continuous school reform efforts is a question for future studies. What the future holds for our public schools will be determined by the evolution of our society. How this translates into established school cultures will be determined by school leadership decisions. I believe the first step in developing a positive school culture is a school leader's ability to listen carefully to problems brought forth by the micro-level community within his/her school while also being able to meet the demands of the macro-level governing institutions. When a leader is immanently present in the situation, listens carefully, and can analyze and synthesize the various problems presented by internal and external influences, they become informed on the values present within the organization. To build a positive school culture, it is important for school leaders to honor and promote the core values of the collective organization. When the mission of the school is aligned to these core values, there is a flow of unity and purpose which has powerful consequences for school success.

Questions for Further Research

This case study had certain limitations including the longevity needed to determine any causal impact on student achievement. Due to limitations the study leads to questions for future research. Questions for further studies include:

1. What methods of adaptation do school leaders use to meet the demands of school reform efforts and change?
2. What is the impact of a balanced equilibrium of efficiency and human needs on student achievement?
3. How does a feeling of being special or distinct within a school culture impact student achievement?
4. How does caring within a school culture impact student achievement and the development of social-emotional skills?
5. What is the impact of democratic dialogue on teacher, parent, and community engagement?

Appendix

Methodology

All inquiry designs are affected by intended purpose and targeted audience (Patton, 2002). The methodology used in this study attempted to document and analyze details of the start-up and the creation of the organizational culture of the school in an effort to provide invaluable data for the development of future university charter schools with ramifications for public education. The research design for this study was qualitative and descriptive, capturing a natural flow of events inasmuch as the research took place in the "real world setting" of school and examined both external and internal natural phenomena of the development of the school's culture. This research was focused on the people and their experiences, behaviors, and feelings by capturing and communicating these experiences through interviews, stories, photos, video, and documents. The field-based design of this study brought direct and personal contact with a wide selection of the school's membership.

Case study was used as the overall design because it provided a means to explore the school's culture in depth. In studying the school as the only entity in this research, the study was more detailed and intensive. As a case study, this research was bound by a five month period of time, and the activities that occurred within that timeframe. A variety of data collection procedures were used, including qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, attending and recording events, daily observations, field notes, document, and record reviews. These provided evidence regarding the nature of the school and its culture, its historical background, and the economic, political, and aesthetic context of the

school. Observations of practices at the school and events that led towards the school's goals and outcomes, indications were revealed regarding the school's culture being unique in mediating the constraints of the dominant national school culture.

After gathering the data, a historical ethnographic report was compiled which is a record of personal accounts of the development of the school and its' culture. As an ethno-historical case study, it was designed to describe and analyze the practices and beliefs of the school's culture within the school community. The theoretical focus of the study was to provide an up-close view of a school's culture. Ethnographic methods were used to study the intact cultural group at the school in a natural setting over a period of time by collecting observational data. This process was flexible and evolved contextually in response to the lived realities encountered in this field setting. In telling the story of the start-up of the school, persons were characterized by the researcher, and events and stories that were most interesting and revealing were recorded. The story of the school was told without using real names of the people or the school.

Constructionism is an epistemology embodied in symbolic interaction and was used for the purposes of this study (Crotty, 1998). Epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know, and constructionism teaches us that meaning always emerges from our interaction with the world. The constructionist epistemology aligned nicely to this ethnography methodology because it offers interviews, observations, field notes, and documented analysis as methods for meaning to emerge in the case study.

The study logically linked the data to the propositions using standard triangulation procedures. Checking information that has been collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data provided validity. Multiple sources of data such as field notes, interviews, focus groups, observation, and document review from a range of membership were used in data collection.

It was important in this type of study for the researcher to become immersed in the community, get to deeply know people, and record impressions (Foley, 1995). After interviewing, observing, or reviewing documents, the information that was seen, heard, or read was written down in the form of field notes. Field notes were one of the most important tools in producing a qualitative analysis (Lofland, 1971), and were a means to collect the ethnographic information. The field notes are descriptive and dated, and recorded information such as: where the observation took place, members present, what the physical setting was, what interactions occurred, and what activity took place (Patton, 2002).

An attempt was made to write notes during or after each event or observation in a notebook. I used notes to reflect during the five month period of the study and watched for categories of culture to emerge using Edgar Schien's (2004) Various Categories to Describe Culture as a guide. Personal calendars and meeting notes, as well as interviews taken over the past two years were also references for the study. These old field notes were historical documents which hold an extraordinary account of the evolution of this school and proved invaluable in telling the story of the development of the school and its culture.

The researcher approached this study by talking to people, attending and filming events and meetings, reviewing documents, and keenly observing and taking in the feel of the school. The researcher attended and observed events and examined documents in order to explore the history of the school. In this study, surveys were not used or weighted as reliable as interviews since they told little about the deeper values or shared assumptions of the group. Interviews were significant in understanding the meaning people involved in the school made of their experiences.

Therefore, interviewing was the basic mode of inquiry. At the heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language and story. This study took an interactive approach which was dialectical in order to obtain multiple perspectives and get clearer interpretations of meaning. A variety of people who comprise the membership of the school community were sought. This included teachers, support staff, parents, university faculty advisors and university administrators.

Ten university administrators were sought to tell the story of the start-up of the school. They included the former Chairman of the University System Board of Regents, the Chancellor of U.T. System, the former Vice Chancellor for System Alignment, the former U.T. President, Provost, and Vice-Provost, the Dean of the College of Education, the former Assistant Commissioner for the State Education Agency, the former Director of the Center for Reading and Language Arts, the paid consultant on the project, as well as a leading researcher in scientifically based reading.

All twelve classroom teachers were interviewed as well as four special area teachers. Of these teachers, five had been with the school since year one, five joined the staff in year two, five were new hires to the school in year three, and two were novice teachers in year three. Five support staff members were interviewed to include three who have been with the school since year one, one since year two, and one who is a recent hire in year three. Five parents were also interviewed. Three of these parents were selected for their leadership role on either the Parent Forum or Education Council and have been active in the school since year one (one had been at the school since year one, but is not in a parent leadership role, and one was selected as a new parent to the school in year three). Five university faculty advisors who have served on the education council, or have provided staff development and curriculum guidance to the school, were also interviewed. Information on the backgrounds of the participants was embedded within the context of the story they provided.

The chart below outlines the interviews which are intended to be administered:

Subject Category	**Sample Number**	**Years at the School**
Classroom Teachers	2	3
Classroom Teachers	5	2
Classroom Teachers	5	1
Part-time Special Area Teachers	3	3
Novice Special Area Teacher	1	1
Support Staff	3	3
Support Staff	1	2
Support Staff	1	1
Parent Leadership	3	3
Parent	1	2
Parent	1	1
University Administrators	10	3

University Faculty Advisors	5	3
Reading Researcher	1	0
Total	42	

This study used in-depth phenomenological interviewing technique which consisted of open-ended questions in order to capture the human experience surrounding the phenomenon of the development of the school and its culture. The experiences of both the university administrators in the start-up of the school and the twelve teachers in the development of the school culture were central to this study. Some time was focused on observing teachers with their students in the classrooms and common areas (Olsen, 1997) and observations of personal time after school were included in order to study the contexts and influences in their lives in relation to the school culture. Impressions and anecdotal information from these interactions were recorded in field notes.

Interviews were conducted with twelve teachers to allow them to describe their experience and place them in context (Schuman,1982). The interviews focused on the teacher's history, reconstructed the details of their experience, and also encourage the teacher's to reflect on the meaning their experience held for them (Seidman,1998). In an attempt for less variability of data, the ethnographic sample size included 42 individual interviews and three focus group interviews.

Group interviews through focus groups are one of the best methods in terms of both validity and efficiency (Schein, 2004). Three focus groups or group interviews which relied on the interaction of the group were used in this study (Morgan, 1988). The reliance on interaction between participants was designed to elicit more of the

participant's points of view. Systematic variation across groups was important to the research design of the groups. This included variation in the ordering of questions discussed by the groups, the use of homogeneous groups versus heterogeneous groups, and the variation in age, ethnicity, gender and educational attainment. The three focus groups included one with teachers, one with parents, and one with teachers, parents, and university personnel.

The following documents were reviewed and field notes were taken pertaining to the following: the school's original business plan, the charter application and charter, school surveys administered to parents and teachers, the campus education plans, meeting minutes from the management board, community advisory council, education council, parent forum, grade level, and faculty meetings, as well as teacher bulletins, parent newsletters, and newspaper and journal articles. The following chart outlines the documents that were reviewed.

Document	**Frequency of Publication**	**Years of Publication**	**Estimated Number of Documents**
School Business Plan	Once	1	1
Charter Application	Once	1	1
School Parent Survey Results	Spring - Yearly	3	3
School Teacher Survey Results	Spring - Yearly	3	3
Campus Education Plans	Spring - Yearly	3	3
School Calendar	Summer – Yearly	3	3
Management Board Minutes	Monthly	3	30
Education Council Minutes	Monthly	2.5	25
Parent Forum Executive Board Minutes	Monthly	2.5	25

Grade Level Meeting Minutes	Weekly	3	105
Faculty Meeting Agendas	Monthly	3	30
Teacher Bulletins	Weekly	3	120
Parent Newsletters	Monthly	3	30
Articles	Varied	4	15

School events were attended and data was gathered by filming, audio recording, and/or taking field notes. These events included the following:

Event	**Method of Recording Data**
Morning Assembly/Community Meeting	Filming, Audio Taping, Field Notes
Classroom Instruction	Field Notes
Education Council Meetings	Audio Tape, Field Notes
Management Board Meetings	Field Notes
Faculty Meetings	Audio Tape, Digital Photos, Field Notes
Parent Forum Executive Board Meetings	Digital Photos, Field Notes
Parent Forum General Meetings	Audio Tape, Digital Photos, Field Notes

The data from these multiple sources were used to answer the following research questions:

- What are the shared basic assumptions operating at the charter school?
- What categories of culture significantly emerge and in what ways are they demonstrated in the school?

The data which emerged from the study was reduced and shaped into a format that could be shared and displayed. Reducing the data was a first step in facilitating the

presentation of the interview materials, and the analysis and interpretation(Wolcott, 1994). A constant comparative method was used for analyzing the data by systematically coding the data into themes and defined categories. Coding was done by marking passages, grouping them by categories and then analyzing for thematic connections. Once the interview audio tapes were transcribed, transcripts were read, and passages of interest were marked and labeled, two copies were made of the marked and labeled transcript. The marked passages on one copy of the transcript were classified and coded into categories to help identify the thematic connections. The other copy of the transcripts was used to select all the passages that were marked as important for future reference.

When interpreting data, it was important to ask what was learned from doing the interviews, studying the transcripts, marking and labeling them, creating profiles, and organizing excerpts into categories. Other important questions during interpretation included: What connective threads are there among the experiences of the participants? How do they understand and explain these connections? What is understood now that was not before the interviews? What surprises are there? What was confirmed? How are the interviews consistent or inconsistent with the literature? How have they gone beyond the literature? The last stage of the interpretation looked at what meaning was made of the work, as well as how it was understood, and what connections were found. This research showed how the individual experience at the school interacts with powerful social, political, and organizational forces which were at play in the creation of the school and which pervaded the context of participants' work. This study describes discover of

the interconnections among people who work within this shared context of school and how it influenced the development of its school culture.

Ethnographic studies are often seen as obtrusive, especially when the participant's position or the institution is highly visible. The ethical considerations of this study included my obligation as a researcher to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the participants in the study. The following ethical safeguards were in place for this study:

1. The research objectives were articulated verbally and in writing so that they are clearly understood by the participant, including how the data will be used.
2. Permission to proceed with the study as articulated was received from the participant.
3. A research exemption form was filed with Institutional Review Board.
4. The participant was informed of all data collection devices and activities.
5. Verbatim transcriptions and written interpretations and reports was made available to the participant.
6. The participants rights, interests, and wishes was considered first when choices are made regarding reporting of data.
7. The participant had the final decision regarding anonymity.

Also important to this study is the fact that the principal investigator and research was also the principal of the school. Due to this, the approach had to remain critical and reflective of possible self-interest and bias. To assure ethical reliability of data all participants were asked to review the transcripts of their interviews to assure accuracy. Transcripts were made available to all participants for review and editing. Three teachers

were recruited to review the narrative summary of the data for accuracy and any blatant biases. This reliability check allowed for a review of the multiple sources of data and correct interpretation.

A Snapshot of the School Today

Enrollment

- Opened in 2003 with 118 students in pre-kindergarten and 1st grade
- Each grade level has two classes of 20 students
- Full enrollment of 260 in pre-K through 5th grade will be reached in 2007

Student Demographics

- Must live in Eastside zip codes 78702, 78721, 78722, 78723, 78741
- 67% qualify are qualify for free and reduced priced meals
- 78% Hispanic, 15% African-American, and 7% White or Other

Accomplishments

- First year of state-wide assessment resulted in "Recognized" by the State Education Agency
- 3rd Grade TAKS results: 100% passed Reading, 78% passed Math
- Accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a voluntary national accreditation system that sets professional standards for early childhood programs
- 90% of families are paid members of the Parent Forum
- 100% of families participate in parent/teacher conferences
- The school has established a three-year plan for achieving the highest state rating of "Exemplary" by 2009

Building Plans

- $13.4 million will fund a 48,000 square-foot, 300 student-capacity building and endowment:

- Phase I, $6.4 million: Administrative offices, library, community center, gym, cafeteria, and meeting areas
- Phase II, $7 million: Classrooms and connecting courtyard

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VITA

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